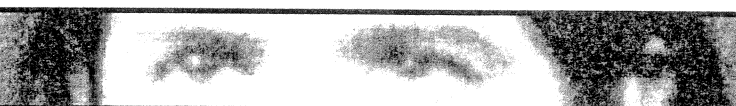


SOME HOPE AND SOME DESPAIR

ISSUE 7
SOMETIME IN 2005
3 DOLLARS



DIRT
I EXCUSE
SINYX
CATHY WILKERSON

Once again, it's taken forever to get this issue out. I've been crazy with my book and crazy with my band. Some Hope has wound up on the backburner. I love doing this zine. But with no actual time restraints, it's not my main priority as of late. Having said that, this isn't a half assed attempt. A lot of my writing has been in my stupid MySpace blog in addition to my newsletter, It's A Living... But It's Not A Life. That's where the milestones, articles and reviews mostly originally ran.

The Cathy Wilkerson interview was a real coup for me. I've been fascinated with the Weather Underground for years. I'm not necessarily interested in their tactics. But they were responding in the way they saw fit at that time. At the time, she was one of the most outspoken members of the group and was a real inspiration. I was glad to find out that while she maybe has had a change of heart in their approach, she is still on a similar ideological course with the same intellectual analysis.

I Excuse are a brilliant Japanese punk band that are finally getting some notoriety after a few great records and tours with groups like Manifesto Jukebox. The language barrier is always an issue. But this short interview was fun to do.

Again, I'm running the complete interviews I did with Dirt and the Sinyx. These interviews are part of the data I've been collecting for the book I've been working on for the past few years on anarcho punk from the late '70s and '80s. Incidentally, I've finally settled on the title, "Let The Tribe Increase".

There are more tour diaries here as well. I don't know why people like reading them so much. I'm glad, as I do enjoy documenting everything I do anyway...

I really don't know who will be in the next issue. I've sent out interviews to Gorilla Anreb but haven't heard back. I'd love to get a couple of Austin bands in here.

Anyway, I'm sick of arty pictures of myself. So here is a really unflattering one of me with Gaye Advert in London.

Peace,
Lance



Gaye Advert = timeless
Lance = aging rapidly

TOP TEN

I'm putting together a few Top Ten's for the moment. Just a fun little exercise that is completely subject to change. This first one: Top Ten LPs from the first wave of punk rock.

1. "Damned Damned Damned" by the Damned

I fucking love this album so much. I used to read about punk rock from England in magazines like Hit Parade and Cream. It was impossible to get these records in Hawaii when they were coming out (unless you were rich or a military brat and usually both). So I would read the interviews and look at the amazing pictures. I finally got a copy of "Nevermind the Bollocks" on cassette and I remember thinking; this is kinda slow and tame. It sounded like Ted Nugent or something. Then I heard that Damned and it was exactly what I thought punk rock was supposed to sound like. It's raw and fast and it's non-stop. The guitars are blasting but it's not metal. It's far better than metal. I still listen to this record once a week minimum.

2. "The Clash" by The Clash

I had read so much about the band, I was expecting this to sound just like the Ramones or maybe even the Stones. When I put it on, I was struck by how varied even this raw garage record was. They were already trying reggae along with the fast punk tracks. Mixed in were some very pretty pop tunes not so different from Raspberries or (to my teenage brain) the Byrds. I remember loving "Remote Control" not knowing that was a faux pas thinking it was like "Feeling A Whole Lot Better" or something.

3. "Marquee Moon" by Television

Again, punk was really fantasy worlds for me. It was science fiction, which had been my previous love. Television sounded like what I wanted a New York City band to sound like. It was together, tight but unexplainably fucked up sounding. I could never put my finger on what it was that made this record sound so different from Cheap Trick or Fleetwood Mac or whoever else I listened to before punk. Part of it was the engaging and sort of vague lyrics. Part of it was the strange guitar arrangements that I didn't know where strange at the time. But mostly, there was a weird feeling of disinterest throughout the record. They were just in the studio doing their thing. But, whatever, you know? They knew it was cool and didn't need your approval.

4. "Blank Generation" by Richard Hell and the Voidoids

A lot of what I said about "Marquee Moon" applies here as well. I love that Hell casually refers to certain people and places as proper nouns without feeling the need to explain or give context. That makes the songs so much more vivid for me. It's a bit of a Lou Reed trick. It works. Most importantly to me on this record is the guitar playing. Robert Quine's solos are amazing. They seem like chaos but fit perfectly into an overall structure. Some people like to say it was like an Action Painting. Others said it was like Coltrane. I really thought it had a lot to do with "Eight Miles High". Anyway, that was how my personal music history was writing itself.

5. "Modern Dance" by Pere Ubu

Bottom line; the only song Pere Ubu ever NEEDED to record was "Non-Alignment Pack". With its detouring of the standard rock progression, they even further intellectualized rock while their Bizarro in the Dead Boys was going the opposite way. I think that song had a deeper affect on me than all of their later (and excellent) music combined.

6. "Singles Going Steady" by the Buzzcocks

I was late coming to this band because I never really loved the Spiral Scratch EP. When I finally found this record, I realized that they were the power pop originators that I had been longing for. Straight up pop with some of the greatest drumming ever, this

collection of singles is flawless. Someday, someone should write a book about how the Buzzcocks and Generation X lead to the Descendents who lead to Crimpshrine who lead to Green Day.

7. "Horses" by the Patti Smith Group

Even with all the arty inclinations, I found this record to be totally unpretentious. Okay, let's strip it down. I love Patti Smith. Everyone else that Deborah Harry was so hot. But I was in love with Patti Smith. She was more like the fucked up girls I knew in school. I thought she was crazy sexy and her voice is unique and beautiful. While I don't like it as much, I never understood why "Radio Ethiopia" was so reviled at the time. I think it's equally haunting and smart in many ways and "Ask The Angels" is a really great rock song.

8. "Cut" by the Slits

You can say a lot of the same things about Ari Up and the Slits. I used to cut pictures of them and Patti Smith out of all the rock magazines I could get my hands on. It's odd to me that it was so easy to find magazines like Cream, Hit Parader, Song Hits, etc. in Hawaii but you really couldn't find most of the records they were talking about. I knew the Slits hung out with the Clash and I knew they were cool looking. When I finally got to hear them it was Earth shattering. Obviously, there was nothing like it. I've enjoyed everything Ari Up has done since. She seems nuts. But she's probably the only person on this list that's done consistently cool and challenging music.

9. "It's Alive" by The Ramones

I actually like the first six Ramones records almost equally ("Ramones", "Leave Home", "Rocket To Russia", "Road To Ruin", "It's Alive" and "End of the Century"). But this one is probably the most representative of what I loved about them. They were so cool looking in "Rock N Roll High School" I ran out and tried every record store in Honolulu before I found "Rocket To Russia". This started my love for this band, which I guess as most of you I hope own at least one of their records, doesn't need explaining. I love the power of this record. I love that they don't stop between songs. As a kid, this was one of my only artifacts as to what a real punk rock show would be like.

10. "(I'm) Stranded" by the Saints

Like the Damned, the Saints were the most solid, fast, rockin' of the first wave. They had a lot more history than most of the other bands having had incarnations going back several years before when most people like to think of the age of punk ('76 - '78). "Eternally Yours" is just as good and precedes the Rocket From The Crypt sound by over a decade.

Runners up: "Inflammable Material" by Stiff Little Fingers, "The Image Has Cracked" by Alternative TV, "L.A.M.F." by the Heartbreakers, "Crossing the Red Sea" by the Adverts, "The Crack" by the Ruts, "Germ Free Adolescents" by the X Ray Spex and the debut from The Undertones.

The Bay Area was making cool music long before punk. Here's a new Top Ten: Best Pre-Punk San Francisco/Bay Area Rock Albums

1. Jefferson Airplane "The Worst of..."

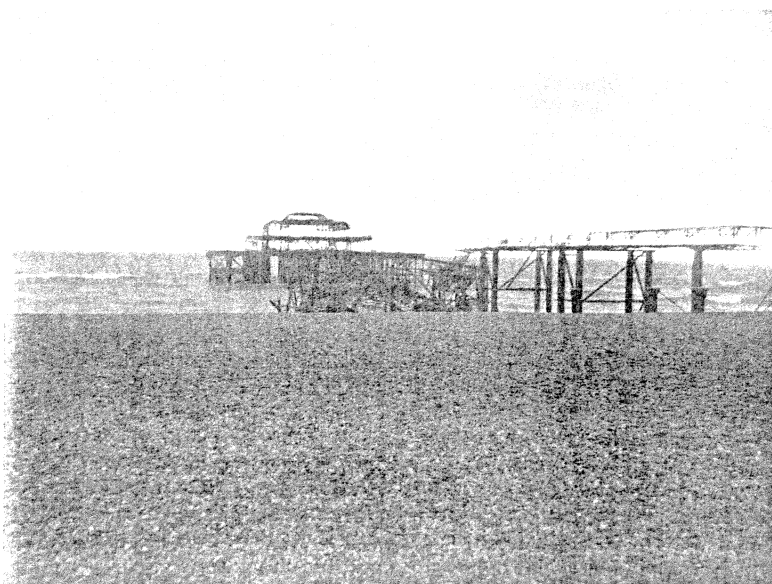
The Jefferson Airplane is one of my all time favorite bands. They're up there with the Damned and the Who and Coltrane. I love 'em and

it's hard for me to pick just one great record. So I'm cheating a little. But this was the record that introduced me to the band. My Mom would listen to it all the time and the song "Later" would really freak me out. I knew what was happening. But the structure was so mysterious to me. Same for "White Rabbit"... I love the competing vocals, the competing guitars, the frantic pace. I think Jack Casady is one of the coolest bass players of all time. This album also includes "Crown of Creation" and "Volunteers", two of my all time favorite rock songs.

2. Creedence Clearwater Revival "Cosmo's Factory"

El Cerrito's pride and joy, my first and fave album of theirs has got to be Cosmo's Factory. The same cool Aunt that got me into "Exile On Main Street" and Black Sabbath passed this record down to me. Six outstanding albums in two years? I wish I were so prolific. Shit, there are great tunes on every Creedence record. An intense and rugged affair, I had already known "Who'll Stop The Rain", "Lookin' Out My Back Door" and

"Up Around The Bend" from the radio. I love Marvin Gaye, but for me this is the definitive version of "Heard It Through The Grapevine". Fuck me, there have been some great versions of that track! As far as great American rock, they're surely up there with the Byrds, Buffalo Springfield, etc.



3. Flaming Groovies "Shake Some Action"

First coming together in the mid '60s, the Groovies were at the wrong place at the wrong time with their electric blues via British Invasion garage rock that was at odds with the far less agro scene at

Winterland of the Fillmore. But by the '70s they were making some all-time classic rock records best summarized in "Shake Some Action". Sixteen tight and emotionally driven pop songs with some of the most in your face guitars of the time.

4. Moby Grape "s/t"

Skip Spence may or may not have been a genius. Having quit as the Airplane's drummer, he started Moby Grape to focus on his songwriting and guitar playing. The band's fantastic first LP showcases both with great structurally sound music ranging from rock to blues to country without insulting or merely dabbling in any of the genres. Despite the intricate and imaginative three guitar attack, the record still remains song-driven over classics like "Fall On You" and "Omaha".

5. Sly and the Family Stone "Stand!"

From '67 to '73, Sly and the Family Stone made some solid records. Only from San Francisco could you find a group almost evenly mixed black/white, men/women playing music unlike anything before. Sly Stone was the first to cross r'n'b with r'n'r to come up with a form of electric soul that felt like anthems and dance music at the same time. "Stand!" was the one I remember as a kid partly because I have a weird memory of seeing them do "I Wanna Take You Higher" live and I don't remember if it was on TV or one of the Crater Festivals my Mom used to take me to. The eloquent "Everyday People" is here too along with the title track, "You Can Make It If You Try" and the notorious "Don't Call Me Nigger, Whitey".

6. Beau Brummels "Introducing"

From San Mateo, the Beau Brummels were part of the American response to the Beatles and their 1965 debut is chock full of great songs on par with the best American pop rock of the time. Their greatest hits, "Laugh Laugh", "Still In Love With You Baby" and the incredible "Just A Little", are all featured here at the top of the batting order. But every track is a memorable tune. They really laid the groundwork for the poppier side of the Haight Ashbury scene.

7. The Great Society "Somebody To Love"

As much as I love the Jefferson Airplane, I'm totally intrigued by The Great Society and that's mostly because of this weird little record on Harmony that I picked up on a whim. Grace Slick's previous band, this record includes the original version of "Somebody To Love" as well as some other fantastic numbers like "Born To Be Burned" and "Nature Boy". More precise and musically educated, The Great Society were like an academic version of the Airplane with much clearer, notated reference points in jazz, blues and Indian modal playing. Not the greatest recording, but it's enough to make the band totally mysterious and intriguing.



8. Blue Cheer "Vincebus Eruptum"

Okay, they weren't really that great of a band and most of their other albums sort of stunk. But this is a great one for the sheer absurdity of it. Hey, "Summertime Blues" right? It's the all time, ultimate Closet Classic.

9. The Grateful Dead "Anthem of the Sun"

Yeah, I know it ain't cool. I mostly hate 'em and the fans drive me up the wall. But they inspired Black Flag and even Tim Yo would defend them. I've got to be honest with you and say that I like a couple of the Dead's albums. "Anthem of the Sun" doesn't feature "Truckin'" or "Touch of Gray" or any of the songs we've come to hate. It's their second LP and is probably their most wildly experimental with huge walls of electronic noise that are often more like Can or Neu than the band you're thinking of. What can I say? I'm trying to be honest here. I ain't cool.

10. The Charlatans "s/t"

Their only release while still a band, the Charlatans' self-titled debut didn't light the world on fire like a lot of people hoped. Knowing they were the first band on the Haight-Ashbury scene, I first heard this record expecting some sort of acid freak out. Instead I get this chilled out, easy going, folk rock record. A lot of people think it's a bit too tame. But I've always thought it was sort of enjoyable despite the occasional corny hillbilly tunes.

BEST OF 2004

It was a bad year. I'm not depressed. I'm just telling it like it was. A bad year. But even in bad years there's some good shit. So here is what I can make of the best of 2004...

BEST MOMENT OVERALL

What can I say? When the Red Sox won Game 7 against the

Yankees, I couldn't contain my happiness. I was at work. The store was empty except for Rachel and me. I let out an uncontrollable roar of elation. I can't think of the last time I was suddenly filled with so much glee.

Keep in mind that I'm a huge baseball fan. Yeah, yeah, yeah. A lot of you close-minded punkers can't stand sports and think it's not punk and blah, blah, blah. It's the same argument punks used to give me about being vegetarian. Nobody could believe you were punk if you didn't like burgers and pepperoni pizza. Well, I love baseball. I don't

preach and I don't try to force it down anyone's throat. I dig baseball and some of my fondest memories from childhood involve watching the World Series or going to see the Hawaii Islanders with my Dad and Grandfather. The Red Sox (along with the San Francisco Giants) are my team and I've been following them for nearly 30 years.

It's 2004 and that might already be my best moment of the decade.

Runner Up
Red Sox sweep the World Series

BEST RECORD

Did I like any records last

year? I must have liked something enough to say it was the best album of the year.... I really don't know. So much crap and so much disappointment and so much failure. I enjoyed watching some bands crash and burn. But what was the good stuff?

It's a sad state of affairs, but easily my favorite record of last year was a collection of singles from the good old days of Indie Pop. Another in their great series of compilations, Rough Trade released "Indiepop 1" an amazing and sentimental collection of singles that pretty closely sum up that genre.

The liner notes from Sean say it all. Indie Pop was like punk rock all over. I loved collecting all the singles. There was a time when I thought I needed every title on Sarah. The music is perfect counting on some of the best from the Shop Assistants, the Wedding Present, Heavenly, the Flatmates and loads more. As is the case with the other Rough Trade comps, also included are more current bands carrying on the tradition such as the wonderful Juniper Moon and Dressy Bessy.

It's a great comp and it's really the only record that came out this past year that I've listened to over and over again.

Runners Up
Signal Lost "Children of the Wasteland"
Les Savy Fav "Inches"
Franz Ferdinand
Iron And Wine "Our Endless Numbered Days"
Ted Leo and the Pharmacists "Shake The Sheets"

BEST MOVIE

There were actually quite a few films that I really liked this year. What can I say? The ones I like aren't usually the ones on the critics' polls. I didn't really think anything of "Before Sunset" even with my dislike for Ethan Hawke. I thought "Eternal Sunshine" was okay but

basically the film equivalent of an emo record. "Hero" was pretty to look at and that's really all.

So I thought about the one movie I watched over and over and even though it drove a lot of people crazy, my favorite movie of last year was "Coffee And Cigarettes". It was back to basics Jarmusch. I am a big fan of Jim Jarmusch. But that is mostly based on his early work like "Stranger Than Paradise" (which is one of my favorite films of all time). In fact, the last film of his to really blow me away was "Mystery Train". So for me, this was a more than pleasant return to form while spanning time in the way Vincent Gallo only wishes he could do. I really think hacks like Gallo are sick with envy when they see films like this. But they'll never admit it.

It looks beautiful and as always he gets the oddest, most interesting performances out of people. It's like they're half caught in the headlights and half projecting Jarmusch's own oddity. I love every moment of this movie and can watch it over and over.

Runners Up

The Saddest Music In The World
Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter... And Spring
Control Room
Shaun Of The Dead
Harold And Kumar Go To White Castle

BEST TV SHOW

"Arrested Development" in its first season was smart, daring and very funny. The cast of the show is perfect. It is one of the few exceptions of a show that tries to rise to the occasion rather than dumb down. Portia De Rossi is becoming my favorite lesbian celebrity.

Okay. Yeah, yeah, yeah. I hear you punkers. TV is bad. Kill your TV. I hate commercials too. The first season is out on DVD so check it out on your own time. It's worth it.

Runner Up

Scrubs

Aw, fuck it. It was a bad year. I've got no more best of anything. Fuck 2004!

HAS TRAVIS MORRISON LOST HIS MIND?

What happened to Travis Morrison? Has he lost his mind? People keep asking me this shit. We toured with the Dismemberment Plan along with Radio 4 a few years back. We seemed to get along pretty well with those guys. Eric is one of the nicest guys you'll ever meet.

I guess Travis has been on some strange pro-Bush/neo-conservative trip. At least, this is what people have been telling me. So, I really don't know. Anyway, I thought I'd investigate with the least amount of effort and this is what I found. You've probably already seen this. It's from Tiny Mix Tapes...

"D: What do you have to say about George Bush? Travis: He isn't

stupid. He's a smart man. He isn't intellectual, but lefties always have a problem confusing intellectual and smart. I know some intellectuals that are boxes of rocks. The left can only harp about things like his inability to speak in public because it has lost all sense of vision for America. That bums me out.

"As for Bush himself... I think he's a B president, earning a C- before 9/11 and a B+ afterwards. I think he's handling the post-9/11 world well, I like enthusiasm for school vouchers, and I think that he actually handled the whole Enron thing fairly well. I'm a somewhat laissez-faire person in terms of economic rules and I think his position was that Enron hid nothing from the world and people should have known more about the company when they invested in it. His environmental policies is OK, nothing great, his administration's desire for mildly authoritarian powers is bothersome but not a real threat because I think they won't get most of those powers... he seems utterly disinterested in abortion and hopes it won't be an issue during his presidency, which is fine by me, because it reflects my own don't-ask-don't-tell ambivalence about the issue... the \$300 tax rebate was a little nutty, but our great presidents all tried nutty things. FDR didn't know what the fuck to do, so he just threw shit up on the wall to see what would happen, and that's why he's on the nickel."

And this is from The Guilfordian...

"C: Are you a fan of George W. Bush at all?

"T: There's been some policies I agree with, some policies I don't. On average, so far, I've been basically okay with his policies. I've been surprised. I'm inclined to agree with the Bush administration's approach to corporate regulation. I think that there's a lot of greed, and I think that there are a lot of people buying into these companies that they don't know anything about. And I think that George Bush is right in that the market has to find ways to pace itself. I think that things like retirement fund insurance are valid, but in terms of things like Enron, if people couldn't see that that wasn't a bad company to own part of then they weren't doing their homework. He got stem cell research, which I was glad for, and he did it in an incredibly

graceful way that I respected. I don't think that any politician will ever turn back the clock on Roe vs. Wade because when it comes down to it, I think that America is basically pro-choice, and I don't think anything will ever happen to that. I dunno, it's hard for me to think of policies where I'm enormously unhappy with what he's doing.

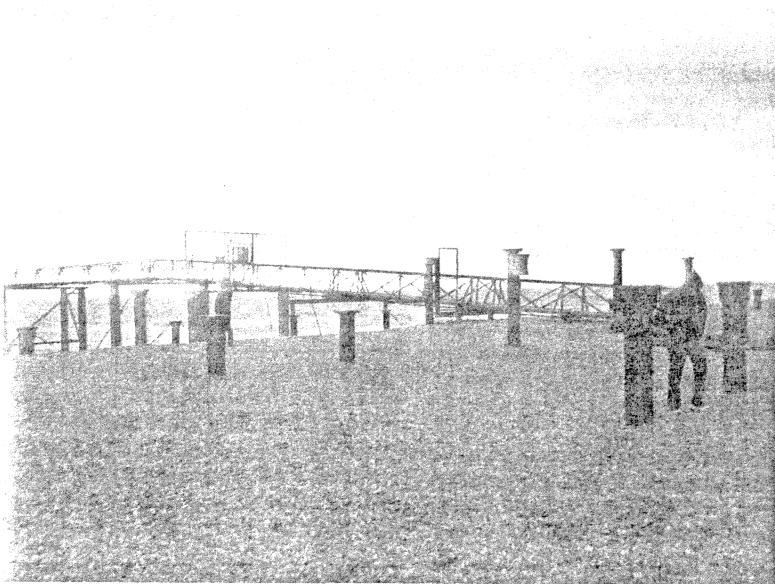
"C: What about the situation in Iraq - the "War on Terror" B.S."

"[A long political debate ensues. He supports the war and I don't.] "

Wow. He must really be bitter about how the Dis-

memberment Plan ended. Maybe this is why they ended. I can't even imagine. Still, what an odd thing to say... Even for nut-job Bush supporters...

I'm not gonna refute what he says. You shouldn't be listening to me OR him for any kind of political information. We're a couple of musi-



cians, which makes us sort of like skilled morons. Read the Nation if you really wanna know what I think about Bush.

In fact, the more I read this stuff, I'm reminded that Travis always seemed, well, I don't want to say he's a phony. But there was always something fake about the guy. He really liked to notion of claiming that he didn't like the Clash or Gang of Four and he's never heard ESG or the Slits, like it was cool to be contrary to the obvious. That's why I say that all this hubbub about "intellectuals" (however he defines that) and the weird need to establish himself no matter what the cost is an image issue and not so much a political one. He likes being an American, just not an "average" American, whatever that means.

I mean, if you buy all you read about Travis, you'll think he's a racist that makes fun of people's accents, a Starbuck's drinking yuppie, patriotic... Nationalistic even... (He does like Michael Jordan and Phil Jackson, so there probably is something profoundly wrong with the guy.) It can't all be true and it can't all be false and a guitar player should never be your role model in the first place.

I think it's possible he's just in a suppressed state of rage still residual from September 11th. The rant he wrote for Pitchfork media around that time was a little crazy in parts. You can go back and read it at the Pitchfork media site and while the content is totally dated, it reveals a lot about how this guy thinks. You can't blame him for not knowing about the celebrations reported all across China or what was going on in San Francisco or that even at Sound Exchange in my little part of the planet people customers were saying "we had it coming". But he's angry about something and he doesn't know how to vent. I can understand that.

But who knows. I haven't seen or heard from the guy in four years. Maybe he really is some sort of flag-waving/Libertarian/indie/funky-white-boy hybrid like the world has yet to see.
Spring 2004

RONALD REAGAN DOES NOT EXIST

Ronald Reagan is gone. There is no Ronald Reagan anymore. He doesn't exist. There's just a decaying corpse that's not even a metaphor. A symbol maybe... Good riddance.

When I found out that Ronald Reagan had finally died I felt a wave of relief that I really didn't expect. For me, Reagan's death was no cause for mourning, but celebration. I soon found out that was true for many, many people as I started getting mass e-mails from everywhere saying how happy they were that he was dead and some saying they were gonna have a party to mark the occasion.

So much of my life has been affected and distorted because of Reagan, it's weird that a guy so far away (and who is the antithesis of everything to me) would have such an impact even before he became President in 1980. I remember when he first ran for the Republican nominee and it was such a joke. Nobody thought that the U.S. was stupid enough to vote for an extremist, right wing, ACTOR to run the country. But four years later he was swept in, and it was a real epiphany for me.

This was before I even knew what he was capable of. It was before I knew that he had used his power to make sure the hostages in Iran weren't released until it best suited his needs. I just knew he was an evil person from what he had done to California and couldn't believe that anyone knowing that would want him to be President. Of course, I was an Anderson supporter AND I was in the 8th grade. But that just shows that I was ideologically precocious as a kid...

I was a real happy kid before Reagan. I know now that I was pretty deluded. But I thought American was a pretty liberal place. I wasn't patriotic. But I wasn't not patriotic. In Hawaii, it seemed like people championed the freaky, hippy, underdog politicians. Marijuana's vir-

tual legality and the distrust of the military presence was a way of life. I vividly remember (like some people saw of the Kennedy assassination) when Nixon resigned. I remember my step dad taking me aside and telling me that I should always remember that day. It was a great time to be a kid.

Everyone knew that Reagan was the guy that busted up UC Berkeley's faculty because of the school's history of dissent and it's reputation of being a politically radical campus. He shut down the radical Criminology program (among others) because of their liberal discourses on criminology that sparked national debate. One of his first acts as governor was to oust UC president Clark Kerr (and he was no saint either) who had refused to crack down on the campus Free Speech Movement. Reagan's the one that dispatched the National Guard on students protesting in People's Park. Despite the fact that UC Berkeley at the time had the #1 rated graduate program in the country, Reagan was determined to destroy it by gutting it saying that state universities should "not compete with Stanford". When the graduating class of 1968 decided to have a "Vietnam Commencement" to show opposition to the war, Reagan tried to shut them down claiming the act of free speech would be "so indecent as to border on the obscene".

Reagan was the one that drastically cut the funding for California's mental health programs in 1967. Using "de-institutionalization" he saved the state millions effectively dumping thousands of people on the streets most of whom couldn't care for themselves. De-institutionalization is now regarded by leftists and conservatives as being responsible for the massive number of disabled people living in the streets and prisons.

It was all right there in front of everyone's faces. Why would they want this bastard for president? I think it was an epiphany for me and probably what lead me, in a state of despair, to join the Revolutionary Communist Youth Brigade when I was 14. My growing anarchist tendencies would eventually get me isolated and ignored by that group. But the fact remained that I was feeling like an outsider, completely, for the first time.

Teen alienation is one thing and is a big part of why a lot of smart people got into punk rock back then. But the level of isolation I was feeling practically directly resulting in Reagan's presidency made me react even more intensely. It was like taking acid for the first time. Reality as I had known it began to peel away and I was learning about how society and America was the big lie. American's weren't stupid or evil. They were being lied to. How do you defend yourself when no one is playing by the rules?

Today I have a much more refined political outlook. But it's still a version of that teen alienation started by Reagan. It's a bit of disappointment and a lot of humiliation. But the anger that results has been tempered with ideology and the hope of a better tomorrow.

Reagan does not exist. But his legacy does. We can't let people start remembering him as a great statesman. It's essential to remember.

Here's a couple of great resources:

www.counterpunch.com (I love this site. Alexander Coburn is my favorite columnist these days.)

www.zmag.org (ditto for this and Chomsky)

Late Spring 2004

RED SOX!!!

I'm a huge Red Sox fan. I've followed the team ever since the mid '70s. I grew up in Hawaii. We only had a minor team, which I loved, called the Islanders. So everyone just finds a handful of arbitrary reasons, and picks a national team to support. For me it was the Red Sox and the '75 World Series was the real clincher. They just always represented to me the dignity of baseball that I live for. Often enough, there is no real dignity in sports. Whether you like

sports or not, you can take even the broadest Marxist analysis and find fault with Manchester United, the Dallas Cowboys and, of course, the New York Yankees. They're teams of individuals corrupted by power as manifested in the money they throw around. If you think I'm being over the top to be funny, you're only half right.

So, I've loved the Red Sox. They were a bunch of regular guys that weren't regular guys. I could relate to Carlton Fisk and Fred Lynn and Yaz and El Tiante. They even had a dope smoking, commie, star pitcher named Bill "Spaceman" Lee who is my all-time favorite player. And equally, I've felt totally alienated and often times offended by the Yankees. What's this mean? Wednesday night was HUGE for me. I still can't believe it. The fact that most people don't really give a shit about baseball in Texas, the fact that I was sitting in an empty video store with one other person watching the game, the fact that the rest of the city had missed the boat only concerned about the Astros didn't stop me from jumping up and down and screaming my head off when the game ended. It still hasn't completely sunk in. I keep watching replayed footage. I keep seeing the fans and the players celebrating. I even took pleasure watching Billy Crystal slumped over in the stands just like I loved every reaction shot of that punk Rodriguez in the Yankee dugout scheming of a new way to cheat to get on base.

I don't know what will happen tomorrow. I have nothing but respect for the Cardinals. The Giants are my National League team, but I have total respect for St. Louis and La Russa. I've even got Super 8 footage of Tavares when he played for the Giants. If they were playing anyone other than the Red Sox I would be totally in their corner. But I really want the Red Sox to win.

Unfortunately, and I really hope I'm wrong, this feels like we're heading to a classic Red Sox meltdown. It's part of their charm and I don't mean that in the sense of the loveable losers. I mean, they win the deeper and less academic victories. With all the talk about how nobody has statistically done what they did to the Yanks, what's most important to people is the week long agony, the intensity of the last four games, the actual act of coming back and winning four in a row rather than how it looks on paper. That's what the Red Sox do best. The '75 World Series is still the best in my mind. The Red Sox lost, but it really feels like they won if only because of that amazing game six with everything leading up to and including the Fisk homerun.

I don't know if any of you saw "Tin Cup". Okay, I don't know why any of you WOULD see "Tin Cup" but I did and it's really not that bad. Anyway, there's a great scene where Costner just gets pathological. He is losing to the evil Don Johnson and can't get his ball on the green. Rather than take a drop, he keeps hitting it over and over from the same spot landing time and time again in the water. At this point, he's completely eliminated himself from the tournament. But he finally hits a good one and it goes right in the hole. The crowd goes crazy. Renee Russo excitedly congratulates him in the now riotous crowd. He says, "I lost". She says that nobody is going to remember who won. They're just going to remember that great shot. That, as convoluted as it may seem, is the perfect analogy of why I love the Red Sox. That's what they do. Aside from all the talk

of Shakespearean tragedies, they have won the great battles while losing the war.

In time, most people are going to see this comeback from three games down to be on par with the '75 Series. It was huge. It was historic. It was very, very emotional. Will they be able to take that to the next level and win the World Series? I love 'em. But being honest with myself for a moment, I really can't predict who will win. I have no idea at all. But if the Red Sox do win, I think for the millions of undecideds out there it will cement them as the greatest sports franchise of all time.

October 2004

LIST OF STUFF...

In response or maybe in conjunction with Mike McKee's list, here's what I've done since high school:

-Dropped out of two different Universities in one year.

-Spent my scholarship money and money I saved working at a Pineapple Cannery to move to Los Angeles just because that

was where "The Decline Of Western Civilization" was from. -Went straight edge. Lost the edge. Walked barefoot along Hollywood Boulevard on acid.

-Lived in Inglewood which is the kind of place scary hip hop songs are written about. Moved to Hollywood which is the kind of place scary Motley Crue songs are written about. Moved downtown near Al's Bar which was genuinely scary at times.

-Worked for SANE/FREEZE for years first as a canvasser, then founding their phone bank and finally as

office manager.

-Saw a lot of old school hardcore bands that people cry about nowadays like Discharge, Attitude Adjustment, Cryptic Slaughter, Dr. Know, Half Off, No For An Answer, Insted, Gorilla Biscuits, Swiz, Inside Out, Dag Nasty, Blast, Uniform Choice, early SNFU, Die Kreuzen, Scream, Excel, the Descendents, Corrosion of Conformity, Bad Brains, Circle Jerks, Indigesti, Raw Power, Government Issue, Verbal Assault, 7 Seconds, MDC, Life Sentence, Social Unrest, Capitol Punishment, MIA, Iconoclast, Naturecore, Final Conflict, Corruption, A/Solution, A.D.S., A State Of Mind, The Wankers, Apocalypse, Confrontation...

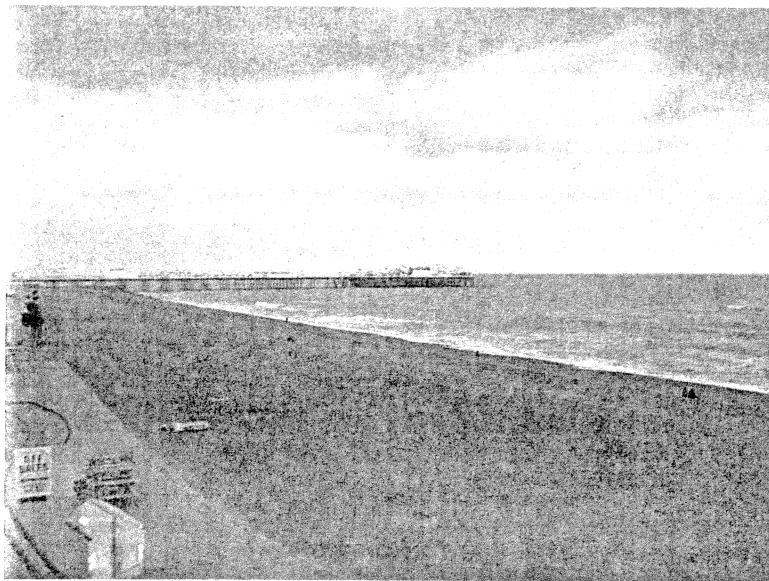
-Saw a lot of post-punk stuff that people cry about nowadays like Jesus and Mary Chain, the Sugarcubes, Rubella Ballet, Savage Republic, Scratch Acid, Dinosaur, Bongwater, My Bloody Valentine...

-Saw a lot of so so shows that people now seem to think were seminal like Faith No More with original singer, very early Jane's Addiction, Guns and Roses during the white chaps period, Sonic Youth on "Daydream Nation" tour, Sonic Youth on "Sister" tour, Mudhoney's first LA show at the Roxy, Nirvana pre-Grohl...

-I saw Operation Ivy lots and lots and I actually liked Isocracy more. Well, sometimes.

-I saw all the classic Gilman bands like Sweet Baby Jesus, Crimpshrine, Stikky, Filth, Blatz, Fuel, Monsula, Econochrist...

-Spent the night sleeping at an LA bus stop.



- Moved in with a girl after I was impressed when she showed me where she had shot herself the year before.
- Ate regularly at the Venice Krishna temple.
- Battled Operation Rescue more than once on behalf of CARAL and NARAL. You have to get up pretty early in the morning to fight the anti-abortion nuts.
- Saw the Dead TWICE mostly to score cheap sheets of acid.
- Dated more than one lesbian. Sent at least one of them back to the other side.
- Played and organized a hardcore show where nazi skinheads showed up and trashed the place stabbing a couple of my friends in the process.
- Smoked opium with a bunch of Deadheads in Korea-town.
- Smoked heroin at a party just cuz.
- Snuck into pools at random Beverly Hills apartment complexes.
- Spoke at an animal rights rally at the LA Federal Building with Jane Weidlin.
- Lived with a girl who got institutionalized and later had to ask me if we had ever had sex.
- Went vegan for five years and then fell horribly off the wagon over a drunken pancake breakfast.
- Moved to San Francisco because Los Angeles was too hot.
- Lived in the Maximum Rock N Roll house for a year where me and Tim Yo were friends and enemies at the same time.
- Helped open Epicenter Zone, worked there, helped close it ten years later.
- Toured Europe eight times, Japan five times, Australia/New Zealand once, the Philipines once, the United States more times than I can remember.
- Threw up onstage in front of 5000 people while playing with Fugazi and Autoclave in DC.
- Been mugged twice and got away both times. The first time was in Amsterdam when I got cornered by some junkies. A huge dude came out from a bar and chased them away at the last moment while they had their arms around my neck and a knife to my chest. The other time was at a walk in ATM where a gangbanger dude and his girlfriend tried to corner me. He had a knife and she was standing by the door. So, I punched her and ran.
- Donated thousands and thousands of sperm cells to a lesbian sperm bank in Oakland.
- Had drinks with Sky Saxon and his young asian companion.
- Smoked pot with Ray Manzarek (sp?)
- Hung out at a bar with Vince Vaughn not knowing who he was.
- Played guitar for Beck. It was a hoot.
- I didn't work for five years while J Church was hella popular and living off the fat of the land.
- I was asked to do an interview for MTV music news and didn't show up.
- I was out looting during the Rodney King riots where I got this cool remote control car.
- The next night I wasn't rioting, but got arrested and sent to Santa Rita Maximum Security Prison.
- I was eating a burrito at Cancun when a dozen gangbangers came running down the street. The workers slammed the door shut and locked it and turned off all the lights. I went and hid with them behind the counter. The gangbangers started smashing out all the windows. The cops showed up just in time.
- I was on the Mission Street bus when it stopped at 20th and 20 or so gangbangers jumped on and kicked the shit out of the guy sitting behind me.
- Got caught in the crossfire of a gang shooting on Mission and had to hide under a car.
- Smoked pot with a bunch of hookers in a really, really shady motel near Mission and 20th.
- Started a record label with the girl I was dating at the time. Lost the girl. Kept the label.
- Got married. Got divorced.
- Almost had a heart attack. Wound up in the hospital for a week and bedridden for a long time after that. Should've died really. Just a little lucky.
- Wound up in Jon Moritsugu's awesome flick "Scum Rock" for a

moment resulting in my IMDB listing.

-Moved to Austin when my girlfriend told me to.

-House burned down with 10,000 records and everything else I owned.

-Started writing a book. Gonna finish someday.

January 2005

NEW MUSIC SUCKS

I got home from work tonight and turned on the TV in time to see some fucking horrible band called Low Millions pose their way through the end of Conan. Jeez. It was too much to take, so I switched channels to see the dreaded Unwritten Law trudge through one of their atonal, emo dirges. If that wasn't bad enough, I switched back to NBC to see an even worse band called the Capitol Years starting up some other talk show. With guitar music sucking so bad, it's no wonder everyone wants to run out and buy a sampler and two turntables... What is the point of these bands?

Early March 2005

NEW MUSIC SUCKS part 2

So, I'm about to leave for work and I turn on the TV. Austin City Limits is on and it's the dreaded Wilco. God, I hate that band. Jeff Tweedy is such a prat. What won't he do to try to get his band to break through? Pavement gets big. He starts writing songs like he's Steve's little brother, Carl Malkmus. Radiohead likes electronics? Out comes the putrid "Yankee Hotel Foxtrot" like he personally discovered the Conet Project. Hey, Beck put out a record of countrified Americana? Voila, "A Ghost Is Born". I swear, I wouldn't be surprised if he fires half of his band again and hires the guys from Lagwagon and signs to Fat OR puts a bunch of patches on his clothes and starts a Tragedy cover band. Wilco is certainly trendy enough to go D-Beat.

He's followed by the equally tepid Bright Eyes. This guy is so insipid. I'm so sick of these self-indulgent, bourgeois, singer-songwriters. Remember, James Taylor was a spoiled, rich kid from the Hamptons. If you can hang with Marx and you agree that everything is political than surely Conor Oberst IS A CAPITALIST RUNNING DOG THAT SHOULD BE PUT UP AGAINST THE WALL!!! Plus, have you ever seen a single photo of him where he doesn't look like a chode?

Late March 2005

"Art is a selective re-creation of reality according to an artist's metaphysical value-judgements. An artist recreates those aspects of reality which represent his fundamental view of man's nature."

Marcel Proust

"For me, insanity is super sanity. The normal is psychotic. Normal means lack of imagination, lack of creativity."

Jean Dubuffet

REELIN' IN THE YEARS

Your everlasting summer
You can see it fading fast
So you grab a piece of something
That you think is going to last
Well, you wouldn't even know a diamond
If you held it in your hand
The things you think are precious
I can't understand

You've been telling me you're a genius
Since you were seventeen
In all the time I've known you
I still don't know what you mean
The weekend at the college
Didn't turn out like you planned
The things that pass for knowledge
I can't understand

I spend a lot of money
And I spent a lot of time
The trip we made to Hollywood
Is still etched upon my mind
After all the things we've done and seen
You find another man
The things you think are useless
I can't understand

MILESTONES

ROBERT QUINE (1942 – 2004)

Robert Quine was one of my favorite guitar players of all time. His playing with Richard Hell and Voidoids was pure inspiration to me. As I write this, I'm having a hard time thinking of another guitar player who has influenced me more.

I remember the first time I heard his guitar playing. Like most people, it was on "Blank Generation". For me, that's the quintessential New York punk song. More so than the Ramones, the Dead Boys or even Patti Smith, that record and that song in particular says New York City to me. I could go on forever about that record and how much those lyrics mean to me. But for this I just want to talk about the solos on the title track. The frantic and edgy playing, I still haven't heard much like it. The only thing that came to mind was the brilliant opening phrases of the Byrds "Eight Miles High". His dense chords mixed with sharp isolated notes seemed right off of the pages of Coltrane or Dolphy.

But it wasn't a complete barrage. He knew when to hold up. He was a master of tasteful playing and timbre worked to his advantage. On later records, especially when he worked with his hero Lou Reed, he further explored this direction with understated, yet completely committed lead work.

I was really excited when "The Quine Tapes" were released. There had been stories of his library of live recordings of the Velvet Underground. Knowing he was picking some of the best stuff, you knew it was gonna be great. It did not disappoint.

The story now is that his overdose was an apparent suicide. His wife had passed away in the previous year and I don't want to read anymore into it.

STEVE LACY (1934 – 2004)

If you are at all familiar with avant-garde or free jazz, and I mean the real stuff from the '50s, '60s and '70s, you'll know the name Steve Lacy. Inspired by Sidney Bechet, he was one of the most fluid and inspired soprano sax players of all time.

Like many players of that generation, he seems to have had some sort of great epiphany in the mid '50s. In one year, he went from playing Dixieland to complete free composition. In the subsequent years he worked with Cecil Taylor and was equally known for some adventurous solo performances.

He did some great recordings with Walter Zuber Armstrong and Don Cherry and Roswell Rudd. But I think my favorite record is a solo concert on Emanem recorded live at Avignon in 1972. For many, this was really late in his career. But his solo, unaccompanied playing is bold and forceful. Each piece is a tribute to a different influence ranging from Gil Evans to Roswell Rudd. More interesting are the non-musical influences he chooses like Kafka and sociologist Elias Canetti.

It makes sense, as another thing I loved about Lacy was his need to combine ideas and formats culminating musical accompaniments to Melville, Burroughs and Beckett.

Lacy died in Boston of cancer.

JOHN PEEL (1939 – 2004)

It was a huge shock to hear that John Peel died. I don't know why it had such an impact. I think he was just one of those guys you kind of expect to always be around and he always sort of seemed to be about the same age. His death made me really think about what an impact he directly had on my life. I actually found myself crying while reading about his funeral service in the Guardian Unlimited.

If you don't know who he was, Peel was a disc jockey in London, the longest lasting one for Radio 1 where he started in the late '60s. Previous to that he had been a popular pirate radio DJ when they were literally "beaming waves from the sea" like the Clash sung about. Most people in punk know about Peel Sessions where he would have the BBC record a special set by a band he chose for airplay. Because of the quality of the BBC studios, for most punk bands this would always be their best recording.

A lot has been made about how he was ahead of his time and broke bands that wound up being seminal. He is credited as having been a major catalyst in the beginning of punk. In fact, at his funeral he had made arrangements that his favorite song of all time be played which turned out to be "Teenage Kicks" by the Undertones.

On the other hand, nobody has really talked about the effect he had on bands like J Church and other small nobodies that were afforded huge opportunities thanks to his support. He picked us out of nowhere and started playing us on Radio 1 all the time calling us "Yank sizzlers". This led to us getting our first European tour (a year before we sorted out our first American tour) based around our Peel Session.

Many doors opened for us because of his constant support including Steve Lamacq giving us regular airplay and eventually our appearing at the Reading Festival with Cornershop and Bis and loads more.

We're not unique. John Peel helped out countless bands like us. I doubt anyone will be able to fill his shoes.

ANDREW "STIG" SEWELL (?-2004)

Stig, who I only knew through correspondence, died while getting ready to head over to England. You probably know all the details at this point. But it's worth mentioning again that Icons of Filth were a band apart from most of the anarcho thrash of the '80s. Their caterwaul of sound was matched by the evocative and often creepy artwork. I regret that with so many chances, I never got to see them live.

OTHER MILESTONES:

Brian Gibson (1944-2004) Directed "Breaking Glass" and "Still Crazy"
Spalding Gray (1941-2004) "Gray's Anatomy", "Monster In A Box", "Swimming To Cambodia"

Uta Hagen (1919-2004) Stage Actress. Blacklisted.

Peter Ustinov (1921-2004) Actor "Spartacus", "Logan's Run"

Hubert Selby Jr. (1928-2004) Author. "Last Exit To Brooklyn"

Victor Argo (1934-2004) Actor "Last Temptation of Christ", "Bad Lieutenant", "Smoke"

Elvin Jones (1927-2004) Drummer for Coltrane, Ellington, Davis and Mingus.

Arthur Kane (1951-2004) Musician. New York Dolls

Rick James (1948-2004) Funk, soul, R&B star. "You and I", "Superfreak"

Bruce Palmer (1946-2004) Musician. Buffalo Springfield.

Robert Heaton (1964-2004) Musician. New Model Army

Erna Rosenstein (1913-2004) Surrealist painter and poet.

Emma Roca Rodrigo (1919-2004) Revolutionary. POUM leader in Spanish Revolution.

Richard Avedon (1923-2004) Photographer.

Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) Father of deconstruction.

John Balance (1962-2004) Musician. Coil.

Frances Chaney (1915-2004) Blacklisted actress.

Jak Airport (?-2004) Musician. X-Ray Spex.

Iris Chang (1968-2004) Wrote "Rape of Nanking"

Kevin Coyne (1944-2004) Musician, painter, writer.

Johnny Ramone (1948-2004)

Karen Lancaume (1973-2005) Actress and adult film star. "Baise-Moi"

Martin Denny (1911-2005) Musician. "Forbidden Island", "Exotica"

Bass Wolf (1967-2005) Musician. Guitar Wolf.

J CHURCH

JAPAN TOUR DIARY

2003

DECEMBER 15th – TOKYO (arrival)

I hate crossing borders. It's not just because the band has had problems in the past (with this one in particular). It just feels so humiliating that some total schlub who CHOSE this kind of work can decide whether or not you are free to travel where you please. Sometimes I think I hate immigration more than banks, lawyers and priests combined.

So here we are. We don't want any hassles, so we don't bring any gear and just walk through. After a lot of anxiety waiting in line, we just breeze on through. Boom. We are in Japan and that 14-hour flight was a cakewalk. I am so happy. It will be great to do a proper tour here. It's J Church's fourth time over and my fifth total.

Due to some miscommunication which was probably my fault (the Japanese are really that efficient. If there was a goof up, it was surely one of the Americans) I didn't realize that nobody would be there to meet us at Narita. We wait around, changing money and getting snacks for a long ass time before I decide to call our girl Kaori to find out what is up. Turns out we were supposed to meet Masa from the Urchin half an hour earlier at a train station. We run down to get the train (the placement of the airport makes it ridiculous to try to drive there) and get there just in time to find out that he is just taking us back across town to Shinjuku to catch a bus. I forgot to mention that the first gig is tomorrow in Fukuoka, which is three islands away.

With a fair amount of scrambling, we make it in plenty of time to catch the bus. Kaori is there to meet us. Not only does she do all the talking, instructing the bus crew on what to do with us, but she has also made some snacks from home to eat on the way up. Veggie snacks are a real commodity in Japan. So it was great to have the little mushroom filled rice balls on the overnight bus ride to hell.

Actually, the bus ride was amazing. In true efficient Japanese style, the bus was divided by a complex series of curtains. Once the porter had them all set up, passengers basically had their own private little sleep chamber. The seats folded back into one of the most comfortable beds I've ever slept in. I snored all the way.

DECEMBER 16th – FUKUOAKA (Keith Flack)

Early in the morning, the bus made a stop at the Japanese equivalent of a truck stop or a road services. The rest of the guys got their first dose of culture shock wandering around the brightly lit little market with it's smells both appealing and repellant. On returning to the bus, the porter had supplied all of the passengers with a breakfast Panetone and box of juice. This ain't no Greyhound.

We are all surprisingly refreshed as the bus rolls into Fukuoka. We meet up with the guys from Practice who we will be doing part of the tour with. Their bass player is a little guy named Tosh who I first met when we toured with the Urchin in the UK a few years back. He was sitting in with them on bass at the time. He's a great guy and good laugh. We chilled out at his apartment for a few hours. Of course, Yoichi is there as well. He is one of my oldest friends and has been doing cool stuff forever. He runs the Snuffy Smiles label that has done most of the records we release in Japan and he has organized all of our tours. It's great to see him and with him along you can only have total confidence in the tour. Now I'm feeling like I have no responsibilities.

David experimented with the electric toilet seats that are so threatening here. When you sit down, you get an arm control full of buttons all labeled in Japanese. David pushed a few buttons getting the bidet going. But it started to get progressively hotter and hotter. He scrambled pushing every button until it stopped just before he scalded something important.

The show was a little rusty. We were a little dazed and confused having just traveled for two days. But the club and the crowd were great and turned out a lot better than our last show, one of the worst in the band's history at Emo's with From Ashes Rise, Bread and Water, and Garuda.

Lots of other great bands tonight. I don't remember the name of the first band, but they were cool Japanese tuneless thrash just the way it's supposed to be. Practice played their tight and efficient power pop ending in a minor disaster as the singer guitarist lost one of his contacts on the stage somewhere. After what seemed like the whole club searching for half an hour, he retrieved it. That's punk in Japan. You lose your contact at a big punk show in the states and it's gone forever. The amazing Pear of the West played featuring the fantastic vocals from Mami who's deep, baritone but

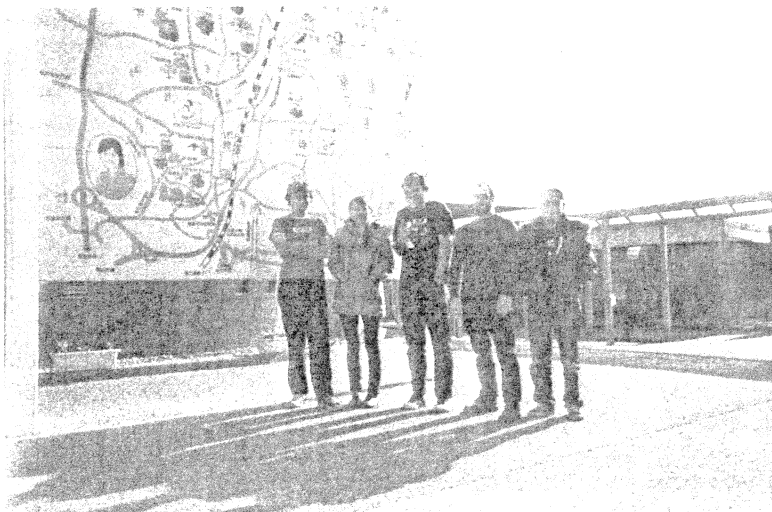
feminine vocal style is very unusual and pleasant in this kind of music.

That night, we were knackered and went to bed. But Yoichi and co partied with the Pear of the West folks for a few hours. In the morning, David went to put on his shoes only to find that Kenichiro from Pear of the West had drunkenly taken one of them by accident. For the rest of the tour, David would have to wear one of his and the other one (a leather Converse, much to David's vegan chagrin) left behind. I think that story sums up most

of what you need to know about David. It certainly wasn't his fault. But he does have that aura of disaster surrounding him.

DECEMBER 17th – MATSUYAMA (Hoshizora – Jet)

Got up early to make the drive. We were split up into two little vans that made you really think about how ridiculous the United States is and how we must look to the whole world. It's not just the Middle East and Cuba and North Korea that think we are absurd. It's everywhere. We are. The fact that American cars are like twice the size of anything else in the world speaks volumes. I guess living in Texas I've got it especially bad. There are so many fucking, big-ass, shitkicker trucks and SUVs in Austin that it really seems like an obnoxious joke. In San Francisco I don't think I knew anyone that



even owned an SUV and I don't think I had ever stepped foot in one. But even American cars of all types seem ridiculously big when you spend some time out of the country. Japan just manages to magnify the differences.

The club itself was really cool. Just a little room with a bar and a lot of glitter and streamers, so it was nothing if not charming. The club has got something to do with Guitar Wolf. Like I think they shot some of their movie here. There was a Guitar Wolf plaque cemented into the outside wall in the middle of all the little xeroxed punker flyers. Looks like the 5.6.7.8.s are on tour right behind us. With "Kill Bill" just out here, they're about to go through something of a Renaissance. I remember them as one of the best bands to ever play at Epicenter Zone and me being one of the few staff members in attendance.

Anyway, we take a walk around one of the many outdoor malls that seem to make up so much of southern Japan's cities. I remember the biggest being in Osaka. But we're not going there. Scattered here and there are loads of tantalizing sites for culturally shocked Americans. The video arcades are amazing. But even more surreal are the Pachinko rooms. The sounds and the colors are all so strange. It's sort of sweet or melodic but it's also very industrial and synthetic. There seems to be a thin amount of distortion on everything here. Hit some record shops. All record shops are great here. Even if the shop doesn't have a single record you want, the records all look cool.

Drift Age play first and are great. It almost seems silly to say as 95% of the bands we have ever played with in Japan are great. It's just a matter of degrees and who is greater. Anyway, they're melodic punk is American, early '90s, Bay Area music made more efficient and concise. Practice play an especially good set making up for the confusion at the end of last night's performance. Tonight is our first night with Minority Blues Band who we will be doing the rest of the tour with. We did a split 7" with them sometime back. But this is our first time meeting them and seeing them play live. From the first note we are all blown away. If you don't know them, you must run out and get both of their CDs. They are both amazing mixtures of *J a w b r e a k e r*, *Leatherface* and old '77 style punk. But it's all modern sounding as well. Singer guitarist, Spalding has a way with phrasing that makes them a lot more accessible to finicky American ears than most Asian punk bands. Live they are a power house with an incredible rhythm section. Bass player George looks great and rocks out leaving no dead air on stage. Drummer Yumi is brilliant. She yelps and kicks in the air all while bashing away perfectly at her kit.

We stay at Yumi's house after making a quick trip to the grocery store for some late night chow. I love going back to a world where people eat on the floor on mats. Reminds me of staying with my grandmother on my Dad's side. We would sit around on tatami mats eating super good homemade Japanese food.

DECEMBER 18th – TOKUSHIMA (Jitterbug)

Had to get up really early to catch a ferry. Ate the food we had leftover from the night before on the ride down. I grew up on this kind of food and you really need to play fast and loose with the

veggie rules in Japan. So I was digging all the tempura and pickled veggies. I think Chris dug a lot of it too. Not too sure about David. Ben was sort of picking whatever since he eats meat and stuff and made a series of bad choices that especially wasn't working for him today. I think he got some sort of ice cold, greasy, clam tempura.

The ferry was actually really cool. You know, you can take a ferry anywhere in the world and it will be completely different. I would have thought that being out in the middle of a large body of water would be the same anywhere. But you can really sense the difference and I don't mean in terms of waves or wind. It's just a feel. No way would you ever confuse this feeling for Dover to Calais. I didn't get seasick which is always a 50/50 proposition with boats and me.

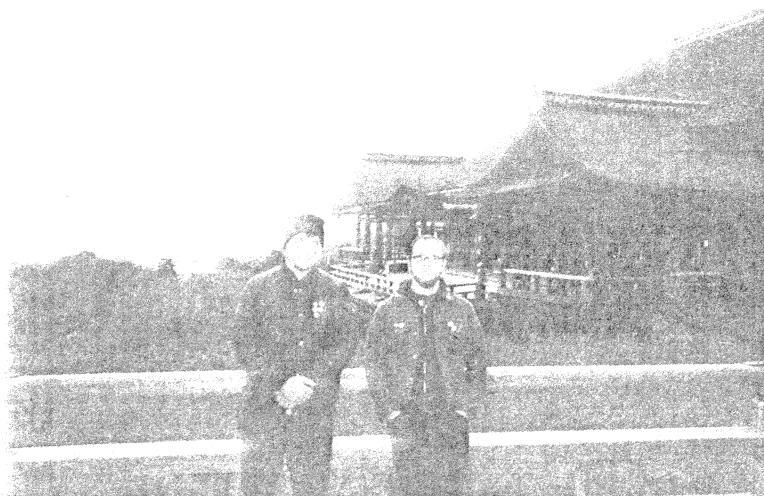
Jitterbug is more of a normal rock club with a proper backstage and a lot of room. There was a cool flyer that I think Chris took for a memorial concert for the guitar player from GISM. I liked GISM since I first heard of them when I was in High School and my sister had bought some weird glossy magazine with an article on punk in Japan. All the kids were wearing GISM shirts. They always seemed really funny to me. "Anarchy and Violence", "Endless Blockades for the Pussyfooters"... I really don't think these are bad translations. It think some of it is meant to be funny. But people take this shit really seriously these days.

Anyway, the show is packed which is a huge relief. This is all uncharted territory for us. We've never come too far south much less to another island. So it is really, really cool that all three shows turned out good. We sold quite a bit of stuff as well.

In addition to us, Minority Blues Band and Practice, we had Hushpuppy (who are a pretty new pop punk band from the area) and Hamk (more established and a lot like early Green Day). I could

be wrong, but I think it was the singer guitar player for Hamk who pulled down his pants for half of the set. He had some long explanation. But I don't know Japanese. So I don't know if it was a statement or if it was meant to be funny. It was just another odd thing to see on the road.

Our set went down great as we were really starting to hit our stride. Got Tosh up on stage to play bass on "My Favorite Place" which was really cool. It was great to look over and for the first, and probably last, time see someone else in the



band that was actually shorter than me.

That night we stayed at this cool house that was half normal where some kid lived with his folks. Across a little walkway was a separate free standing building where all the bands and kids gathered to drink and eat and smoke. Got to do more bonding with MBB and Practice.

DECEMBER 19th – KYOTO (East)

Alright! I woke up really up for it today. I've never been to Kyoto but have always wanted to. On all of these rides, David, Chris and Ben have been crammed in the back seat while I sit in the middle scrunched up with Yumi. I think there might have been a little jealousy as she is a very cute girl and all that is really wasted on me.

Two days into the tour and I already miss Liberty. It's not like the old days where missing my girlfriend would paralyze me on tour. I have a lot of fun on the road and can enjoy myself. But when I get those few and far between moments when I am totally alone with my thoughts I miss my girl plenty.

So we get to Kyoto way early and are able to check out an amazing Buddhist temple up on a hilltop. It's a great spot to buy Xmas presents and whatnot as there are vendors lining the streets leading up to the temple. It would have been cool to buy a sword. But I settled for some freshly made donuts. When we got to the temple it was completely breathtaking. I can't even explain it. The pictures I took look great. But they really don't capture the size or richness in the few basic colors used. There was a hell of a lot of tourists. But what am I? It's not like I got sent here by National Geographic.



In addition to the touring party, we got to play with the amazing I Excuse. I had been really looking forward to seeing them ever since hearing their split with Manifesto Jukebox. They were blistering live. That singer has got such a great voice, it's so punk. Some people just have it. I never really have. Got to hang out with the drummer's girlfriend. I don't remember her name, which is really bad of me. But that's typical when you're on the road. I can't remember where she was from. But she spoke English and seemed happy to talk with other English-speakers.

We didn't stay in Kyoto, but instead did most of the drive that night. We crashed out with the guys from Navel who live just outside of Nagoya. It was great to see those guys again. I love that band. I wish they would do more. The house was lovely with heated carpets. Of course, Ben and I picked the one room without heat to sleep in. Even better, David went ahead and did a load of laundry before asking if they had a dryer. Nope. Nothing like wearing cold wet clothes just as the snow began to fall.

DECEMBER 20th – NAGOYA (KD Japon)

It's snowing outside. It's beautiful. I'm a dork, not a poet. I just like snow. I grew up in Hawaii. Frozen water cascading from the clouds is still an amazing phenomenon to me. Japan blanketed in a thin layer of snow was very sweet.

David, of course, is freezing. Not only is his clothes mostly still wet, but it looks like he lost his sweater somewhere as well.

Nagoya is punk city. The gigs are fun. The bands are great. Of course, Answer Records is here. It's the secret weapon of the punks. It just looks like a great punk shop when you walk in the door. There are records on tables, records on shelves, records in boxes on the floor, records piled up behind the counter. New and used, there is so much great stuff here I could have spent a day going through it all. It was quite overwhelming.

The club is a cool little space underneath the train station. Hey, that's a good coincidence. David forgot his backpack with everything including his passport back at Answer. Everyone knows he can't negotiate his way back there through a Japanese city, so it

looks like it's George's job to go back and get it. David feels really bad about it as you can imagine. But there's not much else that can be done. Unfortunately, I think George is also the most hung-over out of everyone.

I get to reunite with a lot of old friends here. My friend Eiko was there. I think she's been at every Nagoya show we've ever played.

We're one of her bands along with Superchunk and a couple of others. Taylow from the Genbaku Onanies was also there. I love that band. I don't think they've ever put out a bad record. He brought me a copy of the new records; one studio, one live. They're both totally powerful. I really love the family tree included. Looks great. I guess Ken from High Standard is playing second guitar for them now. That's cool. He's a good guy and a great player. It will probably do him some good to get back to basics.

The show tonight is tight with Practice, Minority Blues Band, I Excuse and Navel all also playing. It's pretty mad. It's our last night with Practice and I Excuse and it's such a rare thing to see Navel that this night feels really special to me. The club is rammed by the time we play with no room to move. When David breaks a string I get caught up in the energy of the show and spontaneously start playing "Parkas And Flags" which is the first song on the last CD we did for Yoichi. Without having practiced the song ever, we pulled it off and the crowd where mad for it. It was just one of those rare and magic moments when everything was falling into place. By far, this was the best show of the tour so far.

To beat the snow and to take advantage of lack of tollbooths operating at night, we decide to head for Tokyo after the gig. It was great to play with Navel again and I'm gonna miss the guys from Practice and I Excuse.

DECEMBER 21st – SHINJUKU, TOKYO (Red Cloth)

We stay with some friends of Yoichi's in the 'burbs outside of Tokyo. When we arrive, they're wasted having been drinking all night and are listening to old '70s disco records. The one guy told me that he got so drunk because he was nervous that we were coming over and was nervous about meeting us. When somebody says that to you, it should immediately set off your bullshit detector. But they were all nice enough and I got a shower and just enough sleep.

Shinjuku is my favorite part of Tokyo. Loads of great shops and record stores and places to eat... The venues here are great. I know it's supposed to be the band neighborhood or whatever. But it seems pretty nice to me. The first few times I came here, it was a little seedier with a lot more porn and shops that sold things like worn school girl uniforms with snapshots of the school girls who wore them not to mention used panties for sale. Everything is built vertical here, so you would have to walk through two floors of that before you got to the record shop on the fourth floor. But I like seedy. I may not like what it entails. But I like anything that feels underground and subterranean.

It really feels like a mixture of "Blade Runner" and Epcot Center

walking around this part of town. There are 50' TV screens on the sides of building playing technologically beautiful commercials with amazing resolution. There are crazy lights everywhere and mobs of people in the streets. It's a brilliant place just to walk around at night. Everyone was looking for fancy shoes for some reason. I just wanted records. I wound up buying a couple of books, oddly enough. One was a photo book on early Stalin. The other was a photo book by MCR on the new crust punks. I also got an issue of Gothik Lolita which is a glossy Japanese magazine for goth girls. I kept thinking I could find someone to give it to back in the state. I'll probably still have it in a stack somewhere in five years.

Tonight's gig features Kaori's new band, The Happening. They have a great CD. She has been in so many bands, all great, I really hope this one sticks. This band has the most sophisticated songwriting and probably the best rhythm section. It was really cool to see them live. The Urchin also played tonight which was really cool as it doesn't seem like they play that often. This will be the third continent where J Church and the Urchin have played together. A couple of years ago, we played in San Francisco together. A year before that we toured the UK with them. They're such an underrated band. Now that I think about it, this is also the third bass player I've seen them with!

We played pretty well tonight. But it was all about the crowd. They were up for it and there's nothing like a crazed capacity audience. People were freaking out and we did several encores that we felt we actually deserved (I assure you, sometimes you really don't feel like you deserve it). This one has got to be somewhere in the top ten J Church gigs ever. It's certainly the best one this line-up has ever played.

Afterwards I do an interview for a fanzine run by these non-crusty anarcho types that are working on sorting out an Epicenter type place in Tokyo. It's cool and we talking drink for a while. Kaori helps with the translation. I end up crashing at her place since we wind up being the last people left behind. A couch is a couch and I got to do a little interview for her zine until my eyes just refused to stay open.

DECEMBER 22 - SENDAI (Birdland)

I am an idiot. I meant to grab a copy of Deeds Not Words' demo tonight after the gig and I totally forgot. I am a moron. Great female fronted melodic punk. I guess you could say that they were in the style of Cigaretteman. Maybe... Maybe more like Tilt meets the Avengers but a lot younger.

The crowd went crazy in this little club. I can't remember what records they put out, but some kids run a record label called My Favorite Place Records or something like that. It's very flattering. We don't get many tattoos or things like that. But we've got something like three or four DIY record labels named after J Church songs.

So the crowd goes off. We go off. Everything is building and burning and heading to some apex and then -POW!- the front of the stage explodes, the mike stand flies and I get my front teeth chipped.

I spent the rest of the set feeling little bits of broken tooth in my mouth with my tongue. Still, that's par for the course when you're on a roll.

DECEMBER 23rd - YOKOHAMA (Club 24 West)

It is our last show of the tour and we pull into town early enough to buy Yoichi and Minority Blues Band a thank you meal. We find an Italian restaurant somewhere and it's great. Well, it's great for everyone except for David. Somehow his food arrives swimming in butter with little shrimp floating around. He and Chris are both vegan, so Japan isn't the easiest place in the world food-wise. But I love it. This is the second time I've had a great Italian meal in Japan of all places.

The venue is cool and not too far from some pretty decent record shops where I got a last minute Stalin 12" I didn't have. Back at the venue, Graham who used to drum for Broccoli is there. I forget that he got married to a Japanese girl and had been living in Tokyo. We had a great time. It's funny because he was always the quiet one in the band. Now he's super talkative. I think he was just busting to talk to someone else who's first language is English.

Zerofast, Raise Mind and the incredible Three Minute Movie (all three CDs are great) played with us tonight. It was another totally packed out gig. I don't know if we've ever had a tour this successful. Not a single show was a dud. I mean, on a normal tour, you expect that one show a week MINIMUM is gonna be a total disaster with nobody showing up. But this whole tour has been perfect. This final show is a perfect way to end. The club is packed and most of our friends are here.

When we are done doing our thing, everyone hangs out ordering beers and food. Tray after tray of fried food keeps popping up. They bring a mini-keg for us right to the table. At one point I try a local favorite that is part beer and part tomato juice. Not bad. Not good. Just another in a series of very strange experiences here in Japan.

The tour is over and I think we all wish it were a little longer. Felt like we were just hitting our stride. It felt like we were just beginning to figure out what was going on...

PICTURES:

One: David (J Church), Yumi (Minority Blues Band), Ben (J Church), Chris (J Church), Spalding (Minority Blues Band) at a truck stop somewhere in the middle of Japan.

Two: Ben and Chris at the temple in Kyoto.

Three: Me and Taylow from Genbaku Onanies in Nagoya.

Four: Japanese protest against the war in Iraq.



Here's one of the interviews I did for my book, "Let The Tribe Increase". It's a small part of the confusing history of DIRT.

Lance - First of all, how did the band form? How did you all meet? Is there any truth to the story that two of you met at the Institute for Mental Health? Was this in '81?

Gary - The band was actually formed in 1980... memory of that

bands to play with, it was 'real' DIY... The audiences were similar people to us... the gigs were seen as meeting places for like-minded people. We made lots of good friends... people would produce their own fliers and distribute them. (The fliers were quite diverse... vegetarian recipes... human rights... news and gossip). You didn't have to be in a band to be part of the

DIRT DIRT DIRT

time is a bit jaded (21 years ago). And like everything else you tend to remember extremes... be they good or bad.

I was writing lyrics/music and going to lots of gigs (shows) at the time. I was looking for other people to play with and ended up teaching a friend how to play guitar... (could just about play myself).

Deno was a friend who lived local and we used to go home on the same bus! We never met at the Institute for Mental Health... We did however develop a history of problems that would lead people to believe that was the case... (This was perhaps one of the strong points of the band... our two personalities were so extreme that people who worked with us ended up suffering on numerous occasions).

You may notice we had something like 21 different members throughout the bands history!

Lance - How did you come upon the name Dirt? Was it "punk as fuck" or were there any deeper meanings to the name?

Gary - The name Dirt came about as a result of the way people treated us as Punks. Punk at that time wasn't the 'trendy' MTV thing it is today! It was seen as ugly and threatening. People used to attack you verbally and physically. You were refused service in bars and restaurants etc.

Lance - How did you personally get interested in punk rock? What made you want to start a punk rock band?

Gary - Punk rock exploded in London in 1977. At that point... I was going through the 'growing up phase' not knowing what I was gonna do with my life.

The UK at that time was in a fucking mess. High unemployment. Strikes. Power cuts. There really did seem to be 'No Future'....

Music up to this point was crappy rock bands... same old shit... elevator music.

Punk was loud, fresh, in your face and exciting... It acknowledged its surroundings and said 'Fuck You'. Prior to Punk I felt alienated, had few friends and no idea about what to do in life... Punk gave me confidence and a direction... It certainly opened my eyes to the politics around me and made me think about things... it also gave me something more... a sense of belonging... a "scene" that I wanted to be part of and a vehicle as an outlet for 'my ideas'...

Lance - Had any of you been in any bands previously? Had any of you played music before you were into punk?

Gary - No

Lance - What were the early gigs for the band like? What were the audiences like?

Gary - The early gigs were chaotic and exciting.... We couldn't get gigs at proper venues... always requiring demo tapes and 'play the music game' rules. So we would go out and find our own places... We'd never done anything like it before and it was a huge learning experience. I remember on one occasion we hired a church hall as if it were for a wedding reception. Got

experience.

Lance - How did you get into anarcho politics? How did you first hear about Crass? Were you aware of that scene when you formed Dirt?

Gary - I think the so-called Anarcho politics stemmed from the sense of community that developed after the 'No Future' ideas... The bands at the time were being bought up by the record industry and marketed as 'Anarchic'.

There was no way I was gonna let this be taken away from me... So just continued with the idea that we didn't need the mainstream... and if the punk movement was gonna become mainstream... we'd help re-direct it... create a future.

I had seen Crass play many times... and had become friends with several of them... I'd have to say yes the politics of their lyrics did influence me as they were representative of what was going on at the time... they were a little older than us and had been involved in 'movements' in the past, were artistic and easy to get along with.

They had a vision that made a lot of sense, were not about ripping people off and were genuinely trying to create something... above all open & honest.

Lance - How did you end up meeting Crass? How did you wind up recording for them?

Gary - Crass had been touring with the Poison Girls for a number of years... and then at some point in 1981 the 2 bands decided to stop playing together.

I got a phone call from Steve saying they had a tour in the planning and were looking for a band to tour with... they liked the fact that we were different... ie. Not an all male band with female singer... (Dirt from the outset had made a conscious decision that this would never be the case).

Plus our style and lyrics complemented what Crass were perceived as. On stage we were very non-macho... almost amusing at times and we had a professional approach to everything we did.

Crass put out the "Object Refuse..." EP... as part of their label and as a thanks to us for being part of what they were...

Lance - Your first record was "Object Refuse Reject Abuse" on Crass. Was this your first time recording? What was it like working on that record? What was it like working with Crass on a record? What was it like recording with Penny?

Gary - Recording was weird... never been in a studio before... it was good but also disturbing... in the sense that what may work live on a stage, sounds dreadful when you break down the individual instruments.

Coupled with the fact that our equipment was the cheapest you could possibly get! And I seem to recall having to do my vocals over and over...

Working with Crass was fun, inspirational and laid back. Southern Studios had a relaxed atmosphere and nothing

was rushed... there was no obvious concept of time.

Penny was and still is a craftsman. We worked together recently when he produced one of the Stratford Mercenaries CD's. He sees things from different perspectives and what at first seems odd to me... makes a hell of a lot of sense as time rolls by!

Lance - Did you feel like you were dealing with lyrical issues as a means of expression or as agit-prop?

Gary - Expression... the lyrics come from within... from things around us that happen to us, that we see.

Not sure what agit-prop is....

Lance - The atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki loom large in a lot of Dirt's earlier lyrics. Did you feel your fears of nuclear war were like the fears of the Japanese or did you feel that the imagery was useful in shocking people about the realities of nuclear war?

Gary - Again this goes back to what was going on in the UK at the time. In 1980 England was involved in War games (Crusader 80) with the rest of Europe. The USA was using the UK as a base for Nuclear weapons... We saw peace movements forming with the Women at Greenham Common. Anti apartheid rallies were highlighting race issues in South Africa. War was seen as a real threat at that point.

(And we all know 'War' is a good way of bringing a country together!)

Then... as if by magic... came the Falklands war...

The imagery we were using at the time was used because that was all that was available to us. People like us had little idea what the effects of war could be... those who were old enough for the war that ended in 1945 were a different generation.

We had soldiers in Northern Ireland and we saw the watered down news reports that tv at the time would show.

There was no Internet or satellite TV. Nowadays there is far more access to this kind of information... (yet still this shit against mankind goes on)... We used what we could at the time.

Lance - Who did the graphics for the record? What did the front cover logo represent?

Gary - The text was done by me, the collage was done by Andy (Crass). The skull on the records which was also used as the bands logo was painted by an artist and best friend of the band... Leo!

Many people have submitted to us what they feel it represents... No Comment!

Lance - Did you feel that you related to a lot of the other bands working with Crass at the time (Flux Of Pink Indians, The Mob, The Snipers, Zounds)? Do you feel like there was much of a connection between you and the other Crass Records' bands?

Gary - Of course we related to the bands that were around us... in fact we shared musicians with Flux at one point... We did many gigs with the Mob... (probably one of the best bands of the time).

All the bands had something in common, a direction we all believed in and a hope for the future.

We would pool resources, share equipment/vans and book shows for each other. We helped form networks around

the UK that would allow bands from outta town to have a place to play and stay.

Lance - What music were you listening to at the time?

What do you think were your big influences?

Gary - I can't remember what I listened to at the time... I know my tastes haven't changed that much and my record collection reflects that whole period. I used to see live bands all the time... regardless of what they sounded like... I just loved the whole energy that was around at the time. Can't say that anything really influenced me... you can probably judge that by the way I play!

Lance - Did you tour much after the record came out?

What were the gigs like at this point?

Gary - Dirt were always playing gigs... Between tours with Crass we would tour with the Mob / Anthrax / Polemic... The vinyl release helped in the sense that people knew who we were... other avenues were open to us... networks were getting bigger... clubs were phoning us to play.

Lance - I know you played quite often with Crass. What were gigs with them like?

Gary - Crass gigs were like military operations. Everybody had a job to do... PA loaded in. Screens set up. Projectors and TV's. Backline. Banners hung from the ceilings. The whole room we played in was transformed.

From the moment the doors opened there was something going on. Videos playing. Spoken word artists / poets / etc.. between bands.

The crowds were incredible,

enthusiastic and very large.

One down side being that 'Spitting' was very popular at the time! The more they liked you the more they spat. My guitar actually rusted after one tour.

Some of the gigs were marred by troublemakers... At the time in the UK football (soccer) matches were a place of violence! Certain factions decided to bring this to the shows.

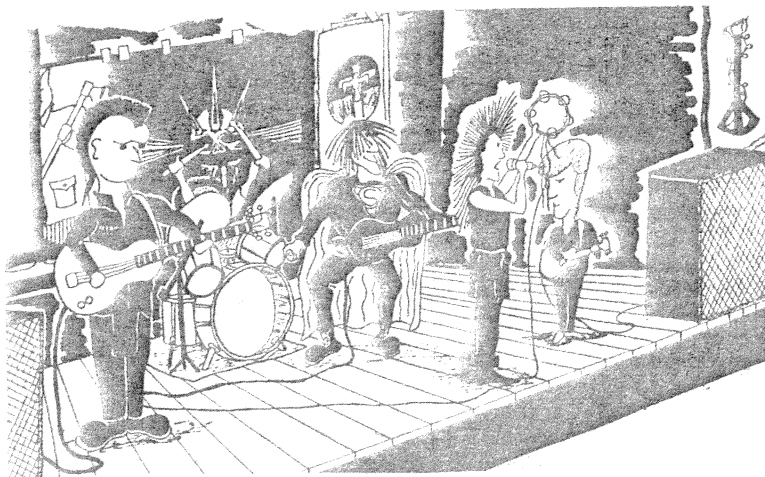
Being politically motivated attracts a lot of intensity and anyone with an issue would show up!

At one gig in Sheffield we were confronted by local people who had lost friends and family on board The 'HMS Sheffield'... A ship sunk during the Falklands war. I remember a group of us sitting backstage before the show, we explained what we were doing and about our anti-war beliefs. There was never any suggestion that we were attacking the dead. It ended on good terms and most people stayed to watch the gig. Very moving!

Lance - The next year you released the live 12" "Never Mind Dirt - Here's the Bollocks". Why did you choose to release a live record instead of a studio recording? Did you feel that Dirt were more of a live experience?

Gary - Studio album was out of the question... our instruments / equipment hadn't changed... Our material was raw and straight-forward. We were more of a live experience anyway and it seemed this was the best way to go!

Lance - There was no proper listing of all the song titles with that record. Was that done on purpose? Were the lyrics laid out purposefully in a way that you couldn't follow along and would have to read them separately?



Gary - It was deliberate... I call it art!

Lance - What do you think helped your political outlook expand between the two records? Had you become more politically active or were you just reading more?

Gary - My surroundings and people gave me my outlook. We did a lot of benefit gigs (various causes) and met lots of activists along the way. Some very close friends were active in hunt sabbing at the time... even going to prison for their actions.

People who know me... know I don't read anything! (Still the same).

Lance - At what point did Lou leave the band for Flux Of Pink Indians? Was she replaced or did she and carry on for a while as a four piece?

Gary - Lou left after the Bollocks album... she played for both bands for a while... I think! I don't remember... doh!

Lance - What was it like playing the Zig Zag club gig? A lot of people think of it as sort of the "October Revolution" of the anarcho punk scene. What were your reflections on it?

Gary - The Zig Zag was certainly an event. We put out notice that it was to be at the Rainbow Theatre. Then the night before... The Zig Zag was taken over... electric turned on and we were in. I drove the van with the backline in it... Met by police at the door who didn't know what to do... so they did nothing. It was a great day... all the bands and the audience alike were friends by this point... It was a party... We had all come a long way together and this was indeed a turning point... where could things go after this?

Lance - The band's first incarnation split at that point. What were some of the factors leading to the split?

Gary - The band had pretty much exhausted itself by this point. We felt we had done a lot... grown a lot... Lou had left... Fox who was the drummer had had enough. The antics of me and Deno had caused a lot of rifts between us all and those around us... For some time me & Deno were pretty explosive (not physically) in each others company. We had trouble agreeing on anything... we were still sharing a house and domestic issues and relationships weighed heavily on what we were doing...

Lance - Did Fox and Vomit go on to play in any other bands?

Gary - Fox and Vomit were brothers. Fox sadly died about a year later. Vomit went on to play in a few non-political local bands...

Lance - Somewhere along the lines another record was recorded for Corpus Christi. How did that record come about? Why was the "Mother / Ripper" 7" never released?

Gary - The Ripper sessions were recorded for Corpus Christi... a spin off at Southern Studios. We were 'perhaps unwisely' left to our own devices... we ran up a huge debt at the studio... couldn't agree on sound or a final mix and ended up in one of our familiar 'disagreements'. It was shelved... and is probably still in the vaults at Southern!

Lance - The band reformed in 1984 with a totally different

line-up. Who were the folks in this line-up and how did you all know each other? Why did you decide to continue on as Dirt and not just call the band something else? Did you feel that it was a continuation of the same concept?

Gary - I had been working with some friends for a while and written some new material... that project ended before it saw the light of day... not wanting to waste what I'd been doing I put it to Deno who then added her contribution... The new line up was made up from friends who were people we lived and hung out with... it just kind of fell into place... What could possibly go wrong?

Paul and Richard took over on bass & guitar and Stuart (ex Special Duties) on drums. This caused a little controversy... but that's life!

We used the name Dirt cos the lyrics/music had always been written by me & Deno and this was still the case.

The idea was the same... we had taken time out, felt refreshed and ready to continue... (this line up was the only time that Deno was the only female in the band). We felt we had played a large part in a movement that made people aware of surroundings and options. And we still had potential and things to say!

Lance - What were gigs like at the time? Who were some of the bands you were playing with?

Gary - Gigs at that time were taking on a new lease of life... Violence at gigs was by now a common occurrence. Music tastes had changed (not from my perspective)... Every new band seemed to be heading towards Black Sabbath riffs... We toured with Antisept for the most part... We even ended up all living

together at one point (hell... in case you were wondering)!

Other bands such as Toxic Waste and Crucifix joined us on some tours.

Lance - How do you reflect on the band's only studio LP? What were you trying to get across with "Just An Error"? You released the record on your own label, I believe. Why did you want to start your own label?

Gary - God alone knows this one... We recorded and released it ourselves. (because we could)... Limited to 1000 vinyl copies only.

In hindsight it was a demo of material we were working on. I think it would have been better if it was recorded a year later!

But a year later and it wouldn't have seen the light of day.

Lance - Were there any songs on that record that had you had originally been playing with the first line-up?

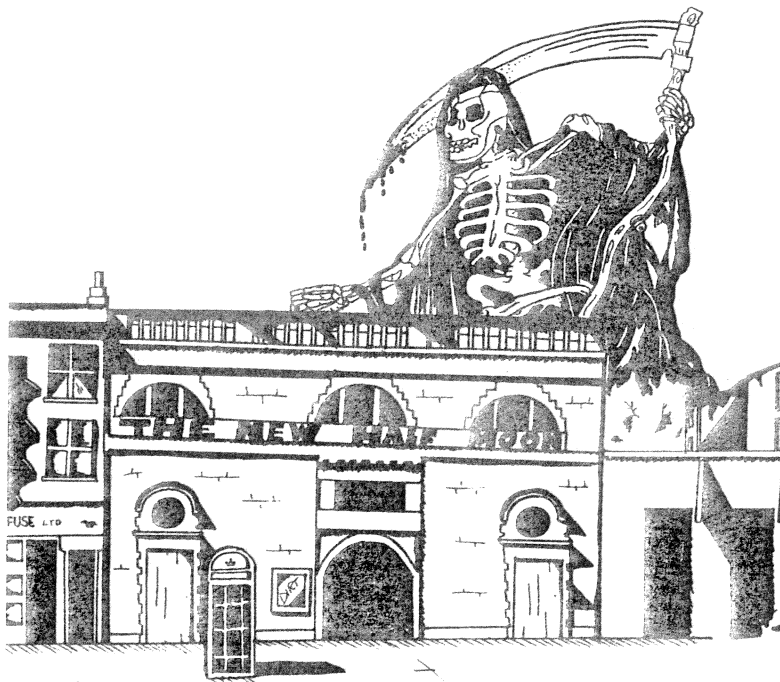
Gary - No...

Lance - Did you know that this line-up was ending by the time you recorded the album?

Gary - No. We were busy planning the next few months. We actually we did quite a few gigs before destroying ourselves!

Lance - Why did this line-up split and did Stuart, Paul or Richard go on to play in any other bands?

Gary - Dirt had a different feel than the previous line up. The tensions weren't as high between us all and we didn't seem to



have to work too hard to make things happen for ourselves. The energy wasn't right and it seemed hard to focus on a direction. I feel, looking back... that we felt we had something to say... but it was more like letting off steam and wasn't working.

No..... after you play in a band with me & Deno... you would never want to experience anything like it again!

Lance - Then the band took a long break until it was revived in the early '90s. First of all, what made you want to get the band back together at that particular point in time? What was the impetus for the return?

Gary - My best friend at the time was working for a music magazine. She took me along to see a band called Daisy Chainsaw... It was one of the first gigs I had been to in years. Fucking incredible!

I was so motivated that I called Deno... who I hadn't seen for a long time. Our lifestyles hadn't changed but we had gone in different directions... We got together and decided to work it through... It turned out that we were both still writing material...

And our different experiences had caused us to feel strongly about what we had done in the past. About the same time as we were doing this I got a call from Ali of Hellkrusher. He had heard from friends that me & Deno were working together and made us an offer! He had made some contacts and was booking a small tour for his band. We went along on a kind of low key "see how it goes"... It went well for us and we were all fired up!

Lance - Was there ever any talk of getting back with any of the old members? Who were the new members and how did you know them? What bands had they been in before?

Gary - Not really... Dirt always ended up in turmoil... so new blood was required... The others in the band had been in some bands before... but I'd never seen them and can't remember the names... (not selective memory I assure you).

The new people were friends of old... except Karen who had been recommended as a guitarist.

Lance - Now I get the impression that the band led a pretty tumultuous life and that you and Deno fought a lot. Is it true that you weren't even really on speaking terms when this line-up formed? What was it like touring and playing live under such stressful conditions? Had that always been the case throughout the band's career?

Gary - Understatement!!!! Dirt was fuelled by the fact that me & Deno could not get along. We were/are both passionate about what we do and both very head strong. We couldn't agree on anything! This was really hard for other members of the band... they would always be caught in the crossfire. It did make touring difficult... but we got a new lease of life when we toured with Hellkrusher... they seemed to suffer more from us than we did!

In fact it caused them to split a few times! Later we did the same to Final Warning... but by this point me & Deno were always traveling in different vans. Our saving grace! Many tours we never actually spoke to each other! But if you'd seen us on stage you'd think we were family.

Lance - I believe that this was the line-up that recorded the "Feast or Famine" cassette. Why do a cassette release instead of a record?

Gary - Originally it was done as a demo whilst on tour in Ireland. The reason it was only on cassette was that it was only a demo and we could press them as and when required!

Lance - The only song from the cassette to make it to the subsequent single was "Lunacy". What do you feel was special about that song and what were you trying to express?

Gary - I think the reasoning behind it was that the cassette had actually sold about 1500 copies and to put out the same songs on vinyl would have felt like we were cheating somebody. Plus the cassette was good enough in its own right. "Lunacy" and the other songs that formed the 2 7" singles were Deno's new direction in writing. Taking on a more personal direction and those

of women's rights. The 2 Toxic Waste songs were added because Deno had performed with them on a tour and we had incorporated both songs in our set.

Lance - How did you hook up with Skuld for that record? What was your relationship with that label like? Why didn't you want to release the record on your own?

Gary - Can't remember all the finer points... but I recall Hellkrusher had dealings with Kleister... we talked and it seemed like a good idea. We had no finance to put anything out ourselves and Skuld has a good network. Kleister was good to work with and easy to get along with.

Lance - There was a more serious tone to what the band were doing in the '90s especially in the artwork. What were you trying to get across with these more abstract record covers?

Gary - Not sure what you mean by more serious... I have always considered what we do to be serious.

It's easy to put out a record and miss the point that art plays a strong point in what you do... (Gone are the days of photocopies and stencil/ lettraset etc)... I think we realized that artwork was 'not' a strong point in our list of talents!!! We decided that someone more artistic should be involved. Lin Cummins, artist/photographer was given the space...

Lance - How did the split record with Mankind? come about? How did you know them? How would you describe that band? Did you ever get to play any gigs with them? Do you feel you had much in common with them musically or ideologically?

Gary - We had played with Mankind on a few occasions. Tribal War were releasing some of their material and asked if we were interested in putting something out... We had 2 tracks from the same recording session as the Skuld 7" so... released a split. They were seen as the US version of Dirt! ... (Well... at least soundwise).

Ideologically... hard to say! On the surface... probably... but we are worlds apart... We are much older! A little wiser? More jaded... more cynical... better looking... we face different problems to them... different lifestyles... different backgrounds...

We are all part of the same scene and I consider Stacey and Bill to be really good friends of mine.

Lance - When you toured the States with Hellkrusher and Final Warning, was that your first time over? What were your personal impressions? How do you reflect on that tour? What were some of the better and worse moments? What made it imperative for you to come back that same year? How did that tour go for you? Was the first US tour just a test run for the later tour? Did you feel that all the touring was putting a strain on the band?

Gary - It was our 1st US tour. I think we were all really impressed that the scene was thriving on its DIY level... the enthusiasm was overwhelming and we met tons of good people and bands.

It seemed odd at times... the age gaps between us all.

All ages shows mean that majority of audience are under 21...

The tour was great... 3 bands traveling in 2 vans. We covered a lot of ground but didn't make it to the west coast... there's only so much time you can put into touring in one go... that's why we came back later the same year.

Subsequent visits have led me to the conclusion that whilst the 'punk movement' appears to be growing... when people get to 21 they tend to avoid all ages shows... leaving bands with a new audience to play to... unless they start playing in bars!

Some of the best moments that I recall... this is hard... the basement shows in Chicago / Wisconsin with a jam session at a local bar afterwards! A 2 day party in Minneapolis! Hanging out in Dallas on a very hot day! Playing an AA club in Long Beach & having to pass breath tests to get in! Riot police stopping the shows in LA & again 2 days later in Phoenix. Falling in love a "couple" of times... seeing the Redwoods / deserts / truck stops / some presidents cast in a mountain?

Getting to play with Aus Rotten and Naked Aggres-



I met I Excuse on our 2003 trip to Japan. Nice guys in a nice band. Two great punk CDs on Snuffy Smiles.

T: Tomo

G: Gon

M: Masa

Lance - Tell me something about punk rock in Kyoto. What old school punk bands came from Kyoto? How long has there been punk rock there?

Tomo - I don't really know about old Kyoto's punk so much, because I come from other place. But there were "old punk bands" like SS, Continental Kids...although I had begun to toddle at that time, maybe. Gon - Any time there are many good bands in Kyoto. They play almost hardcore style sound, and currently there are such bands like OUTNAUTS, CONSTRICTED, ONERIVER and so on. We sometimes play with them and the shows are always very fun. Speaking of old Kyoto band, I'm influenced by an old Kyoto's punk band called BLOW ONE'S COOL. If you find their stuff, I recommend you to hear their stuff.

Lance - How did you first hear about punk rock?

T - I grew up in the countryside, and when I was in high school, I often borrowed some records from a friend of mine who liked indie foreign (well, that meant US or UK there) music. Then, some of them shocked me like Leatherface, Dead Kennedys, Clash, Bad Religion and so on... It was the first time to hear punk rock for me. I think there were only two people besides me who listened to such kind of stuff in my town. It was quite coincidence. Now, that guy never listens to punk anymore, and there are just big fuckin' shopping centers and pachinko halls the same as like another countryside in Japan. But I think it happens not only Japan, don't know about pachinko though... Anyway, then I started a band. But I didn't know English at all and there was no information about underground? punk around me at that time. So I really didn't get the point. Even though most of the CDs from major label or distribution that like I only could get have some translated Japanese lyrics and explanations, it was not enough. After came to Kyoto, I've been getting to touch with more DIY punk ethic stuff and that's the second impact of punk for me.

Lance - Had any of you been in previous bands?

T - We had played in some other bands that nobody knows..

Lance - How did you all meet?

T - We all were in a same college in Kyoto, and we met there. Champ got his guitar stolen by someone, Gon had a long hair, Masa was singing more than now... Well, Japan's colleges are quite hopeless. For example, in the college we went, they invited McDonald for the student's voices, though there were already six school cafeterias. I don't think that case was directly the company's invitation, but the students wished. That sounds crazy..

Lance - What's the meaning behind the name I Excuse?

T - That's like "I can't be just in their (like the cycle of the permanent (I don't think so though) capitalism) line anymore, and doing shit band or something like that can look an excuse for them, but I don't give a fuck. Here's my excuse in your face." or something like that. I've just thought it now. Well, I don't know this state can be called real capitalism or something else, anyway the people like your parents or teacher or boss hate things that without "a promising future" (I don't know this expression is what I want to say, how do you say..?), you know.

Lance - How would you describe your band to someone who has never heard you?

T - People often say our music sounds like Leatherface, Jawbreaker, Husker Du or something like that. So I should say so, maybe.

Lance - On your first record you cover an Articles of Faith song. Do you think that song represents something in I Excuse?

G: Yeah, I'm also influenced by A.O.F, and that song is one of my favorite songs. The lyric of this song is also great. I think this song fits our attitude.

Lance - How did you hook up with Snuffy Smiles? How did you hook up with Newest Industry?

T. When Skimmer and Travis Cut came over Japan in 2000, we

played with them at the Kyoto's show. I think it was our second or third show. Then, a guy who with half naked (it was summer) and dark tan talked to us after our playing, and it was Yoichi (from Snuffy Smile). He liked us at that time, and we also had known Snuffy Smile, we've been getting along with each other since then. And we got acquainted with Dave, from Newest Industry, through Yoichi. He liked our stuff and offered Snuffy Smile to release a European version of the CD on Newest Industry.

Lance - What is "Sex and Demonstration" about?

M: About myself, I'm kind of wishy-washy guy but I sometimes feel strong myself...I've been repeating that to avoid facing my shit daily life and think about it.. The song is for kicking such myself ass.

Lance - Did you tour much after the release of that record?

T: Not really, but we did a European tour last year and it's the longest one. It was awesome.. Then in this April, Manifesto Jukebox comes over to Japan again and we're gonna tour with them.

Lance - How would you compare playing in Europe with playing in Japan?

T: I thought there was more relaxed mood than Japan's show. It's hard to find a place that we can rent low price or free to make show in Japan, especially in the cities. So we always have to pay lots of money for doing show and let it out quite early for saving money. We actually went to some squats or kind of places like that for the first time, they were really great. You never find such places in Japan, you know.

Lance - How does the latest record compare to the first?

T: Well, there's nothing particular difference so much for us.

Lance - Why did you call it "...is dead"? Why did you choose that cover art?

T: Yoichi made the cover, and he chose it from an old Chinese writer's print collections. He would've used some of them also for other stuff, like the design of Snuffy Smile's T-shirts or flyers. About the title, currently we are choked in every aspect, but I don't wanna die and living without a struggle certain makes it worse in any range. Or just simply, our excuse is just dead thing that filling for the part of the system.

Lance - The lyrics on this record seem to cover a broader subject area. Did you do this on purpose?

G: All lyrics are based on a question, discontent and resignation against my dairy life. I'm not aware of a broader subject area. I always take a notebook to write down my words. And such words become the lyrics.

Lance - Do you feel like the record has a slightly more cynical attitude than the first one?

G: I don't think that so much. I often heard that the sounds change harder than the first one. I think it's the same attitude both the first and second.

Lance - What are your favorite songs on the record and why?

G: It's hard to answer. I like all of the songs.

Lance - What is your favorite thing to eat?

T: I always use tofu and fried tofu a lot for making food, and those are my favorite. When I was in Europe, I felt it's a kind of heaven to people from a country, which has few vegetarianism. I heard you live in Texas now and that's reminds me, there's a friend of mine who lives in Dallas now, she made some her original Texas foods (like Tex-Mex food? she called a kind of them "Cowboy Pasta") for me in Japan and it was good..

Lance - What is your favorite drink?

T: Anything before my eyes...except salmiakki (a Finnish liquor). I'm a fuckin' poor bum.

Lance - What is your favorite place to play?

T: We've figured out that the lower stage is the better for us playing. No sunshine, either.

Lance - Any last comments?

T: We'll make new 7" in this year, and we hope to do US tour sometime soon. I'm really looking forward to that.. and thank you for interviewing us, Lance.

G: I'm glad to give us the chance of this interview even though our English is poor. And I hope to see you at the show (bar) in the States before long. Thanks for reading to the last.

I first interviewed Steve on his involvement with anarcho band, Kronstadt Uprising. Here's a follow-up I did with him on Sinyx.

Lance - How did the band form? How did everyone know each other?

Steve - The band formed in 1979 – All were friends from School and/or the local Southend area Punk scene, (Barrett and Auntie were from Rayleigh, just outside Southend) hanging out at Shrimpers and Crocs and the Focus Center. The Sinyx were the first overtly political punk band from the area. The 'first' pure punk band was The Machines in 1977, who put out an EP in 1978 on Wax records and were local legends.

Lance - What was the story behind the name?

Steve - I'm afraid I can't remember. I think it was Aunties idea.

Lance - What was the band like in the beginning? Were they always connected to anarcho politics and the whole Crass scene?

Steve - From the off there was something special about the band – I remember seeing their first gig, with the Icons – the place was rammed with Punks and Skins and they blew the roof off the place. They were very intense on stage, and the Sinyx had these really memorable songs like Camouflage and Therapy Through Violence. They never set out to be pigeon holed into any kind of corner, and always took their own stance on things. Obviously, there was a Crass connection, and they were very helpful in advising the Sinyx on the best way to put out their own independent EP etc and were very encouraging, but essentially he Sinyx were quite unique.

Lance - What bands would they play with back then? Were there other anarcho bands in the area or were there gigs with other punk bands?

Steve - In the early days, the Sinyx would play with the Erratics and Flux of Pink Indians out of town a lot – Sid from the Flux briefly played drums in the Sinyx. They were great double –bills, as The Flux and Sinyx were coming from the same kind of place, but playing quite different stylistically, which made for great, original gigs. Around Essex the band would sometimes play with The Wax-work Dummies of The Icons.

Lance - What was the Focus Youth Centre all about? Were there other venues that the band played at frequently?

Steve - The Focus Youth Centre in Central Southend was a great place. It was quite a large purpose built building, with a Downstairs Bar and Stage, an upstairs bar (The legendary Pine Bar) and a main theatre. Both Sinyx and Kronstadt would hire out the main theatre and put on several gigs there, with various guest bands poets etc. The woman who ran the center, Pat was a great lady, really supportive, and most local Punk bands got their first gigs there. The places didn't have a bad sound and there was always a regular punk clientele, so from 1980 to about 1986 it really was a key place to get started and play. The Pine Bar was almost exclusively Punk, and was a safe haven to hang out. In London, The Sinyx would play the Pied Bull quite a lot, and in Southend the other main venue was The Grand Hotel.

Lance - What was Elephant Studio in Wrapping like? Was the demo recorded there ever released?

Steve - It was quite a large studio and didn't get a bad sound – (the KU recorded their first demo there). The only track from the Sinyx demo that was ever released was "Mark of the Beast" on the Crass Records compilation "Bullshit Detector Volume 1".

Lance - How did the band wind up on the first "Bullshit Detector"?

Steve - I can't really remember – but I think Auntie knew Penny Rimbaud, he gave him a copy of their first demo, Penny liked it and put it on the compilation

Lance - What was the band's relationship with Crass? Did being on that compilation have a tangible affect?

Steve - The band got on great with Crass who were always very encouraging. Penny helped out with great suggestions on getting The Black Death EP off the ground.

Lance - What were the rest of the songs like on the tape? What bands influenced their music at that point?

Steve - The first demo was recorded on the 1/3/80 at the Elephant Studio, Wapping, London, with tracks including "9-5 Auschwitz", "Bullwood Hall", "Camouflage", "Britain is a Mausoleum", "Mark of

the Beast", "Automaton" and "Therapy through Violence". It was a great first recording – Best songs on it are "Mausoleum" and "9-5 Auschwitz". It's got quite a unique sound. Aside from the usual Punk influences, Barrett was into the Velvet Underground, and I remember Auntie being into Chrome.

Lance - What was the second demo tape like?

Steve - There were four songs on it, Animal, Decadence, Suicide and a re-working of Britain is a Mausoleum. It was produced by Barry Martin (local guitar legend, now playing in the Hamsters). I think it was slightly overproduced, with a few unnecessary guitar effects, however, it wasn't that bad and did show the evolution of the band and Barretts rawer singing style – Best track was Suicide.

Lance - What were the gigs like at this point?

Steve - The 1980 era gigs were excellent, intense affairs – playing with the Flux a lot and helping generate a great scene. (See Question 4) by 1981 when the line up changed, the gigs became, if anything more intense, and when the band would play their two key songs – "Fight" and "The Plague", the place would erupt. Also, there were a number of great alternative venues always cropping up – disused churches etc where some great gigs were played.

Lance - What bands were they playing with at the time?

Steve - Mob, Flux etc

Lance - What led to the end of the first line-up? What led to Paul Brunt and Vints leaving the band?

Steve - I don't really know – after the Sinyx I don't remember Paul Brunt playing in any bands. Vints played in the Nihilist Corps and KMosaic for a while and I lost touch with him after that. He was a great drummer and on the local scene was quite a legend.

Lance - Who were the Icons and what were they like?

Steve - The Icons were a Southend Punk Band that existed between 1979 – 1980 and consisted of Copper – Vocals, Fiif – Guitar, John – Bass and Peanut – Drums. They were a good live band, and recorded one demo. After they split, Fiif went on to play guitar in the Sinyx and Kronstadt Uprising, and John went on to play Bass, then guitar in the Sinyx, and Bass in Allegiance to No one.

Lance - What led to two of them joining the Sinyx? How did that come about?

Steve - After Paul Brunt and Vints left, the Icons had split up at the same time, and being friends and coming from the same musical background, it made sense to join forces. With Auntie moving to drums, it led to a new, harsher and more powerful sound.

Lance - Who was Rob and what was Reality Attacks fanzine all about?

Steve - Rob ran the fanzine and was really into the music and ideas of the idea, and subsequently when the idea of the EP came about, it made sense to put it out in conjunction with the fanzine.

Lance - Were there ever any other releases on that label?

Steve - Not that I'm aware of

Lance - What was Spectrum Studios like? How would you characterize the sound on "Black Death"?

Steve - Spectrum studio was brilliant. It was a small studio in Westcliff, on the outskirts of Southend. It had been there for quite a while, and the engineer, Warwick Kemp was a cool guy who had got this amazing 16 track from Decca, who'd used it in the '60's to record bands like the Rolling Stones. It got a great sound (The Kronstadt also recorded their last demo there in 1986). Sadly, under strange circumstances in the early '90's there was a fire at the studio that completely destroyed it and everything was lost, which was really tragic

Lance - What was the meaning behind the name and the cover art of the record?

Steve - Mainly it was Aunties and Paul's idea, so you'll have to ask them, but the key song on the EP was "The Plague", which had the lyric 'anarchy is here – the plague of peace' and so the "Black Death" fitted the title excellently.

Lance - Was this a conscious effort to separate from the Crass scene?

Steve - Not really, it was a conscious effort to stick to the Sinyx ethos of being completely independent and doing it themselves

Lance - What led to the third line-up change?

Steve - When Fiif left the band, they had a rethink about the sound,

and wanted to pursue the really intense wall of intense sound they'd been developing, so Andy Whiting (ex-Kippars and future Sonic Violence Bass player) was brought in on Bass, John Edwards switched to second guitar, Auntie switched to first guitar, Barrett carried on singing and I stepped in on drums. (I was really into that heavy, tribal style of playing at the time that suited their songs and sound quite well).

Lance - What were the songs like at this stage? How similar was the band to when they first set out?

Steve - The set was quite a mixture of the old and new at this point. Whenever the band would play live, a large portion of the crowd would always want to hear some of the 'classics' like "Britain is a Mausoleum" and "9-5 Auschwitz", which we enjoyed too, but the newer songs were becoming really strong and we would introduce more and more of them, creating quite a formidable canon of work. Newer songs like "David's Star", "Charles Manson/g", "Kiss of Death" and "Blasphemer" were especially strong.

Lance - What were the gigs like at this point? What was the first gig like?

Steve - The gigs at this time were

very special, and when the band and audience clicked in, it was a very intense and uplifting cathartic experience. We'd regularly leave the stage covered in blood from the intensity of our playing. The first gig I played with the Sinyx was in a big hall in Forest Gate, London. I think it was with the Mob and Rudimentary Peni and was a great gig. Probably the best gig was at The Centro Iberico in West London. We played with the ubiquitous

Mob, amongst others, it was a great summers day. The inside area /venue area was painted in an astounding array of colors, it was rammed with a very encouraging and up for it crowd, the sound was great and people tell me it was one of the best gigs they ever saw. It certainly felt great to play - I remember it was really hot, and so intense, just before the encore I had to vomit, temporarily passed out and just made it back for the encore of Fight.

Lance - What bands were you playing with at this stage?

Steve - We played with the Mob a lot, Riot/Clone, Assassins of

Hope, Rudimentary Peni, Nightmare loads really.

Lance - Were there any recordings made with this line-up?

Steve - No real demos - I think we made a 4-track reel-to-reel of a couple of songs at the rehearsal studio, but I've never heard them. There were a lot of live bootlegs I remember, which was really the best way of hearing the band at their best.

Lance - How did the band finally split?

Steve - In late '82 after a really powerful gig with Rudimentary Peni at the Moonlight in Hampstead, London, Paul Barrett left the band, and without his voice I didn't feel it would be the same, so I left too. (I also wanted to concentrate on Kronstadt Uprising a lot as we were starting to take off at the time) Auntie, John and Andy Whiting

carried on for a few more years, with Mark Bristow in the vocal limelight for a while, and with Donald on drums, but I think that line up eventually disbanded around '86, where not too long after, Auntie and Andy Whiting started up Sonic Violence

Lance - Do you think of Sonic Violence as a continuation of the Sinyx?

Steve - Yes and No really. Without Paul Barrett, it wasn't really the Sinyx, yet at the same time, Sonic Violence



took that intensity of the Sinyx and took it in a different direction. The song "Blasphemer" was the last new Sinyx song I remember playing with them and was the only Sinyx song to my knowledge that Sonic Violence did. Auntie was the main Sinyx songwriter, so obviously there was that legacy and simultaneous continuum, but personally for me Paul Barrett was the voice of the Sinyx, and once he left, as I said earlier, that was the end of it for me to.

Lance - Did the singer, Paul, ever do anything music or band related after leaving the band?

Steve - Paul briefly sang with the Kronstadt Uprising in late '83 whilst Paul Lawson temporarily left, but it didn't last more than a month, and to my knowledge Paul hasn't sung in a band since. He was last heard of as a psychiatric Nurse, living in Lincoln in the North of England.

Cathy Wilkerson may not be a name too familiar to all of you mean punk rockers. But it should be. She was an active member of SDS, a founding member of Weatherman and one of the Weather Underground. If you're at all familiar with the story of the Weather Underground, one thing you are probably familiar with is the townhouse explosion in Greenwich Village that took the lives of three members of the Weather Underground. Wilkerson's father owned the townhouse and she would later serve almost a year in prison for explosives charges relating to the explosion. At the time, she had been out on bail for clubbing a police officer during the Days of Rage in Chicago. Very active, intelligent and outspoken, she's been an inspiration to me for years.

Lance - When you were growing up, was your family inclined towards left politics? Did you grow up in a progressive household?

Cathy Wilkerson - My family were Republicans and in 7th grade I wore a lot of "I Like Ike" buttons. They raised us to value a strong family orientation, hard work, social responsibility, belief in the equality of all people and in the importance of a level playing field of opportunity. They also placed a great value on curiosity and exploration of ideas, people and places. My family's values have stayed with me, but my understanding about economic and political history is now very different and so my beliefs about how to best act on my values is very different.

Lance - At what point did you start thinking about politics or global issues? Was it in college or before?

Cathy Wilkerson - I began to find an explicitly political language in poetry in high school - through the Wordsworth and Sandburg I read in school and the Beat poets and folk and rock lyrics that traveled in the youth underground. It was here I first heard of the anti-nuclear, union and civil rights movements.

Lance - How did you become active in your politics? Could you talk a little about the Woolworth's protest in Chester? Did that directly lead you to get involved with SDS? How were you familiar with them?

Cathy Wilkerson - I went to college at Swarthmore in Pennsylvania and the spring of my freshman year, 1963, got organized to go to Cambridge, Md. to support attempts to integrate public facilities and to end employment discrimination. The older Swarthmore activists who led the Swarthmore contingent were among the founding members of SDS and had been at Port Huron. In the fall of my sophomore year they again organized me to participate in a picket line outside a run-down segregated school in near-by Chester. We were all arrested and held overnight. From there I became very involved in the Chester project, part of what became SDS's Economic Research and Action Projects (ERAP) for the rest of that year.

Lance - What was it about SDS that made them more appealing than other progressive groups at the time? What are some of your happier memories with the group? I guess what I'm trying to ask is, was it all work or was it fun at all? It's really hard to tell from different people's accounts...

Cathy Wilkerson - One of the main appeals of SDS was that it was a lot of fun. After growing into adolescence in the 1950's where

behavior and beliefs were rigidly ruled by unspoken social expectations based on race, class and gender - with enforcement by family, social cliques and high consequence taboos - to find a community in which diversity was celebrated and tolerance for all kinds of unconventional behavior was a protected norm, it was like dying and going to heaven. Of course class, race and gender issues were still there, but there was space to challenge. The culture was defined by the fact that we KNEW we had broken free and taken charge. National SDS meetings were the most striking because in smaller chapters particular cultures of rebellion could dominate - but on a national level the diversity ruled. We worked hard and parted hard in an infinite range of expressions.

Lance - How did your politics evolve from liberal to radical/revolutionary?

Cathy Wilkerson - The assumption of this question is that "revolutionary" is somehow more advanced than "radical." That's loaded with too many undefined assumptions for me to respond to.

Lance - Were you already familiar with feminist politics before SDS? What inspired you towards feminism at the time?

Cathy Wilkerson - Many of the first feminist activists of the mid and late sixties were a few years older than I and many had far more knowledge of or experience with progressive activism than I had. For younger women like me, the opening up

of opportunities by SDS was so overwhelming, it took a while to sort out the sexism that was also embedded in the experience. I was introduced to feminism by these women who started reading and talking about the issue in the mid sixties and then meeting in small groups by 1967. Most specifically, I was engaged by Marilyn Webb who lived in Washington DC where I did and who - along with Charlotte Bunch and others - started the DC women's group in late 1967 early 68.

Lance - Could you talk a little about the founding of Weatherman? I assume it was in the middle of SDS...

Cathy Wilkerson - No Weatherman came along as SDS was in its last stages. SDS's strength always lay in its role as a physical and intellectual gathering place where young people networked, processed enormous amounts of information collectively and informally, and experimented with different programmatic expressions of those ideas. It never solved the organizational dilemma of how to actually be effective as an organization. That didn't matter that much until 1) the scale of Vietnam became overwhelming with hundreds of US casualties a month, and 2) violence against the black movement escalated with dozens of activists killed and especially when 3) COINTELPRO (the government spying and dirty tricks program geared to sow internal dissension) became really active in the white left (after being busy in the civil rights movement for years) and specifically in SDS. Then the organizational weaknesses started defining SDS. Everyone started feeling the need for the "best" response and it quickly started to dissolve into factions. No one came out clean in these debates. But SDS was never equipped to be big and when it got big it was time to invent new forms of organization.

Lance - Do you think the end of SDS or the development of Weatherman was inevitable? Are there any regrets about the end of SDS or did it seem like a logical time to do other



things?

Cathy Wilkerson - SDS was a phenomenon of the sixties. It never had a programmatic identity that could have survived. It wasn't the point. Every year people would put organizational questions on the agenda at national meetings and float proposals for how to fix the most obvious problems and the main body always tabled the proposals in favor of talking about the draft, racism, the war, women's issues etc. We had no local models or experiences to guide the discussion for how a national organization could function and so there was no basis for solving the problems.

Lance - During that time, what made you ally yourself with Weatherman instead of any of the other groups that were splitting out of SDS?

Cathy Wilkerson - The question of race. No one else was distributing stuff to read and talking about it as a central - as *the* central - construct. I think now the way it was done was manipulative to some extent and certainly the theoretical framework was flawed, but many people, myself included, felt that despite our unwavering support for civil rights, SDS had missed something else in the discussion about race. Since national liberation struggles around the world were gaining strength at that time - many of them were explicitly dealing with the US v. third world construct - and many black activists in the US were exploring nationalism, certainly we needed to understand the history of these ideas and how they impacted on efforts of whites to participate in change.

Lance - Was Weatherman a response to the issue of non-violence vs. symbolic violence or was the initial idea more ambiguous?

Cathy Wilkerson - The talk about violence in the late sixties was mostly about self-defense. Black communities in the South had long practiced armed self-defense in certain situations but no one talked about it, because to talk about it would have been to provoke a white racist response. But in many isolated rural communities or black neighborhoods people had shot guns to defend their homes. Some people like Robert Williams argued that it should be talked about and made an explicit part of the strategy. The Black Panther Party then took the idea of armed self-defense to northern cities, but made it a question of community defense, using the states own laws to frame it.

A m o n g Weatherman of 1969, there was no explicit discussion of using violence as an offensive strategy in any of the collectives I was in until the Flint Convention during the end of December 1969 and even then it was presented through images and slogans rather than any explicit arguments. Everyone talked, sang and danced revolution but no one really talked about what that meant in the US. Weatherman attempted to do that, but they said revolution here would happen as the result of the victory of national liberation struggles around the world causing the core of US imperialism to disintegrate. The job of whites was to organize support for people of color. Unfortunately, while I believe support is important, I think now that everyone has both a personal and social stake in change, and we are working hard for our collective survival. To "vanguard-ize" any segment of humanity is very dangerous. Whites did and do need to be a lot better at listening to people of color - individually and organizationally - but all members

of humanity depend equally on our ability to right the ship.

Lance - At the time, do you think your decisions as far as a change in tactics was more intellectual or emotional? Which would you say dominated these choices?

Cathy Wilkerson - The debate started with whether or not you wanted to support the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam or whether you were just anti-war and supported the slogan of Bring the Troops Home. This debate required us all to read and think about what were the justifiable grounds on which people could take up arms to defend their homeland. Still, national liberation struggles were all framed by self-defense against imperialism - or in the case of South Africa - against apartheid's rulers. I was very affected both by Regis Debray who wrote about the decision to take up arms in Cuba and in Central and South America and by Franz Fanon who wrote about the Algerian War against the French. The problem, as defined by Weatherman's leaders, was that since white people in the US were not fighting a battle of self-defense but instead came from the community that was causing the problem it left us as the only ones who were still pacifists - with no obligation to take up arms.

So - over the course of 1969 and into 1970 various people in Weatherman came up with various constructs that would require white radicals to take up arms and take the same risks as people of color. First, in the summer of 69 Weatherman's strategy was to pick fights with police in public places to convince young people that we were tough thinking that would convince them to join us. Then in the fall of 69, Weatherman paid more attention to the fact that there had been thousands of small little bombings over the past year or two - fire bombings of ROTC buildings, banks that supported apartheid etc. and began to develop the capacity to join in on these bombings. Then in late 69 and up through the townhouse,

various collectives developed strategies to go farther with armed struggle to begin offensive actions to take heat away from the assaults on the black movement and the Vietnam. Finally, after the townhouse explosion, Weatherman settled on symbolic actions in the tradition of armed propaganda. In other words symbolic attacks on targets that we wanted to hold accountable for particular policies.

These constructs were only vaguely thought out and barely articulated in each stage but the organization rushed headlong from one to another really without much of a

plan anyway. Over the next few years, the WUO continued to try out various theoretical contexts for the strategy of symbolic bombings and about the relationship of whites to armed struggle. In my opinion, now, we never came up with one that I could agree with today.

Lance - Seeing as the group originally took their name from a Bob Dylan song, was there any analysis within the group about the role of pop music or even pop culture especially at such politicized times? Part of why I ask this is because I had heard that when the police murdered Fred Hampton, he was listening to an Eric Dolphy record. I don't know if that's exactly true or not. But it seems like he was listening to radical music to go with the radical politics and I just wonder if there has ever been any analysis of that



sort of thing.

Cathy Wilkerson - First, Fred Hampton had been drugged by something dropped in his drink a couple of hours earlier and was fast asleep during the assault. That's why he was shot lying in the bed. Second, the only issue that was discussed with any organization-wide coherence was race. Weatherman consciously spent more time acting and less time talking. Music was so much a part of what we thought and how we saw ourselves that it would have seemed silly to analyze it. It was music that popularized the concept of revolution - not radical literature. And - much of the discussion about revolution remained on the level of images the way it was presented by different artists. Only a tiny minority of activists actually took up any systematic study of what that meant - even within Weatherman, only a hand full of people thought about it in any systematic way. Later, in the New Morning Statement, the leadership put out a position about music and youth culture but it, too, only represented one aspect of the organization.

Lance - Did the group have an organizational hierarchy? Were actions decided by consensus?

CW - Weatherman was no better than SDS at either asking any of the critical questions about organizational structure or solving any of the challenges. The WUO took secrecy to be the essential variable and set up a highly hierarchical structure in which the leadership collective knew everything and people in the collectives knew nothing and therefore had little power. In between there was a very informal and therefore highly subjective strata of people who had personal relationships with one or more people in the leadership collective and therefore had access to information and power. There was no transparency or accountability. On occasion someone would challenge that but because of the secrecy others would not know that - and since everyone took common responsibility for safety no one could ever figure out a way around that problem. This kind of structure inevitably breeds inequities and corruption and this was one of the main things that finally brought the organization down in the mid seventies.

Lance - At the risk of trying to oversimplify, how would you characterize the politics of the members of the Weather Underground? Marxist? Leninist? Maoist? Communist? Anarchist? Socialist?

Cathy Wilkerson - All of the above ... for starters.

Lance - There's been some talk, probably not enough, about machismo, especially in the early days of the Weather Underground. How much was that reality and how much of that was for the cameras? How much did the machismo directly translate into sexism?

Cathy Wilkerson - Weatherman was only one manifestation of a general hardening of movement culture in the late sixties because of the factors I mentioned above. The same could be seen within black, Latino and Native American activists as well. There's definitely a relationship between the abandonment of democracy, the turn towards military strategies and aggression. (Machismo is a rich and complicated historical idea, which I don't think, should get mixed up with sexism, aggression, or imperialist culture even though elements of all those things run through it.) Because Weatherman was a white organization the way aggression was played out had

to do with the culture we came from - both the mainstream imperialist culture and the culture of white progressives who had resisted racism and/or exploitation (not always at the same time) for three hundred years.

We knew that if you really stand up to the injustices built into the system you would suffer incredible violence. It's interesting to note, however, that the civil rights activists of the early 20th century who planned Brown v. Board of Education and the early challenges to Jim Crow knew this too - and their response was to create a movement, which used non-violence to protect itself. But we believed that we had to create ourselves into a form that could withstand that violence by becoming violent. It seemed logical at

the time, but was the wrong place to start. Aggression, like all human instincts can be helpful or not to individuals or societies depending on the circumstances. It is ultimately a defensive instinct because it seeks to destroy not to create. The task of those who believe in justice and planetary survival is to create new forms and cultures that will allow human beings to coexist with our habitat without self-destruction. There are definitely some limitations to non-violence as a strategy. Gandhi discovered in India that he could not gather a critical mass of people into the movement without relying on Hindu symbolism, which later

fed into religious tensions. In the US, the civil rights movement never really found a way to apply popular non-violent struggle to economic issues. But once discovering these limitations we should explore a host of ways to get past them or to invent other strategies. A resort to violence should not be a knee jerk response.

Today, most national liberation movements that looked so hopeful have failed with the exception of Cuba, South Africa and Vietnam who continue to be innovative and to tackle problems creatively. The perpetrators of violence are primarily western powers and religious fundamentalists. Male supremacy is in full reaction to fifty years of gains for women. I think the limitations of violence as an offensive strategy are much more apparent.

Lance - How do you reflect on the effectiveness of the Weather Underground? Do you feel like your actions made an impact directly? If yes, in what ways? Do you feel like they've had long-term impacts in terms of subsequent generations of radical/revolutionaries?

Cathy Wilkerson - I still puzzle about this one. The big and lasting changes to come out of the sixties were roughly 1) in the area civil rights and a successful end to the iron hold of Jim Crow laws, 2) the cultural changes in gender roles, relationships and our generations challenge to consumerism, and 3) the end of the war in Vietnam without a nuclear holocaust. SDS certainly contributed to all three although certainly more to the last two. Weatherman was very confrontational and flashy, but compared to the contribution of anti-war G.I.'s and vets, for instance, we were quite insignificant. The radical Catholic pacifists who stole the FBI files - leading to the exposure of COINTELPRO - and who poured blood on draft files around the country were another small group who made a huge contribution. We lent our voice to the chorus, but we certainly didn't have a solo role.

Lance - What is your opinion on radical and revolutionary groups of today? What do you think when you see or read



about the anti-globalism protests at the WTO? Do you feel any sort of camaraderie or does it make you feel squeamish?

Cathy Wilkerson - I had been immersed in teaching and in working with children from backgrounds of abuse and neglect during the eighties and nineties. I hadn't had a minute to follow international developments in any detail. I had been slightly annoyed by friends who talked about how bad NAFTA was because their arguments against the growth of global trade seemed so small minded. I wanted to hear an argument about how global trade was the hope of the future but here was a set of beliefs that needed to guide the development of that trade so I played devil's advocate to the extent I participated in the conversation at all. When Seattle happened, I realized that this whole conversation had been going on amongst a great many young people and I knew that if the movement had that kind of depth, the conversation I wanted to hear was out there, I just needed to find it. I also knew then that this was a movement that could make a difference. I still didn't have internet access at that time. But within a year or two I got on line, 9-11 happened, and I stopped teaching full time so I could write the book. It was then that I found the conversation and started sitting in on a number of organizations in New York and was very excited about what I saw. I felt the same kind of commitment and questioning that characterized the sixties.

As a generation we were outraged by the hypocrisy of the rhetoric of the cold war about our democracy. Young people today were outraged by the extent to which most major decisions are being taken out of the democratic public forums and hidden in the private sector. Plus, between corporate funding of candidates and the increasingly alarming specter of vote fraud it seemed like the public forum itself - at least on the national and state levels - were becoming a farce.

I also found that young people had some better sense of the history of progressive people to make democracy more democratic, although it was still sketchy. I think all the interest in the sixties might help today's young people avoid some of the mistakes we made. I also hope they can learn from the things we did right that were so powerful, because we did a lot right and the affects of the changes were so far reaching it has taken fifty years for us to even begin to take stock of them.

Lance - Considering the times, why do you think there isn't a similar response to Bush and Iraq to say nothing of the poverty in this country? Why do you think there is a new interest in the Weather Underground? What do you think of the new slew of books on the group?

Cathy Wilkerson - Tens of thousands of young people - then and now - were so frustrated by the difficulties of change and by the moral outrages being committed by the country's economic and political leaders that we wanted to abandon caution and reason and act on the purity of our outrage. Weatherman's strategy - although few would have been able to say so at the time - was simply to speak the outrage in the purest forms we could imagine with no thought to how that might or might not actually change anything. While most people - for a whole host of reasons - didn't do it and disagreed with Weatherman, it spoke to

the anger seething inside many of them. People frequently say to me "I thought what you were doing was wrong, but every time you did an action I cheered." People felt a need for that voice to have a public expression. Now, I think many of us feel a need for that voice again, but I hope we will find more creative and less damaging ways of doing it.

What was damaging about it? Inherent in the voice in the way we expressed it was the challenge to everyone else, that their work was somehow of lesser quality. It put forth the willingness to do armed struggle as a criteria for leadership and so it was setting ourselves up to be the leaders of the movement, even though at the beginning we denied that occasionally. Secondly, inherent in the decision to form a Marxist Leninist Party, which in some fashion or another we were involved in, is to abandon democracy as a means for engendering change. This is a pretty serious step and we took it without most of us ever having a conversation about it. If democracy is the goal - and we are angered because we don't really have it now and people in the third world have even less access to decisions that affect their lives - we need to think carefully about the organizational forms we use to get there. Lenin thought that he was improving people's access to decision making but the democratic centralist party has proven almost as problematic as the attempts in the West to have a real democracy. I don't have the answer nor do I now think there is one answer for all places, all situations and all times. But we need strong functional organizations but not ones that are made "to last forever." SDS, for instance, was terrific until it reached a certain size. It would never work today because there are far too many people who would want to join at the onset. But it was not a "victim" of its success. It was time to move on. But then, we didn't know what to move on to or how to find out. Now, I think people are carrying out the experiments to answer that question and its very exciting.

Lance - What did you think of the film "Weather Underground"? I was really shocked when I saw it that you were not even mentioned. I'm not even sure if they mentioned Kathy Boudin or Jeff Jones.

Cathy Wilkerson - Sam Green and Bill Siegel asked me to participate in the film but after several long and interesting conversations I

concluded that what I wanted to say would not really have a place in their film. Also, I was teaching back then and working fifteen-hour days seven days a week and didn't really have time to collect my thoughts in the most articulate fashion. I really have to work at presenting my ideas coherently. So, I decided not to participate. In the end, I think they learned a lot making the film and the film succeeds in raising some good questions. Perhaps the telling of the history and the raising of some questions is all you can do in two hours. It was their choice not to mention names beyond those they interviewed and it



was fine with me.

Lance - When people write or talk about the group now, there seems to be a sort of romanticism of it. Sort of a Bonnie and Clyde element. Do you resent that? Do you feel like that might have been an element of the group?

Cathy Wilkerson - Well, I certainly think that any kind of writing or talk that romanticizes the experience does an injustice to today's

activists. In most ways we did the best we could under the circumstances and we have a lot to be proud of that we did. It is also true that we had little knowledge or understanding of the history of the impact of violence as part of a strategy to fight for justice and equality. Our thinking about it – and there was a great amount of diversity on this subject within the organization – was generally defined by our middle class, white backgrounds. Our concept of what it means to provide leadership to any segment of the movement for social change was equally naïve and quite arrogant. While the Weather's analysis of imperialism and racism were substantive and challenging even if incomplete and somewhat flawed, our analysis of the beliefs, goals and strategies for social change were pompous and damaging to the movement. But it's not like others had it more figured out during that period of 69 and 70. Everyone was grasping at straws – although I think we did more damage to each

questions like how political consciousness develops in young people in the US and to look at the way personal history, community culture and national and international affairs interweave and affect each other. It addresses some of the big issues raised during the sixties around race, class, gender and human nature. I try to look at change and leadership from the perspective of having worked in education for the past twenty years where we talk a lot about change, about goals and process. This language has been helpful in going back to evaluate our efforts in the sixties.

Lance - Anything else you wanna add? Did I leave anything major out?

Cathy Wilkerson - Much of the energy of the sixties was fueled by our tremendous sense of hope and possibilities. As young people, we felt we could make a difference and we did. We are indebted to earlier generations of activists who laid the groundwork for the civil



other and others than many. The important point is, though, that there is an enormous amount to learn from our mistakes. We took a lot of risks and invested everything and so we turned over a lot of stones. Many of those mistakes will be repeated if we don't have a conversation about the them that seeks not to lionize or blame, but to look beneath for what forces were at work, what was missing in our thinking, what parts of it did others understand better and so on. Romanticizing the history makes learning these lessons impossible because it makes the nitty gritty of what happened inaccessible to others.

Lance - Is your book finished? What stage is it at?

Cathy Wilkerson - The book is close to being finished, but since I am also teaching it will still take me several more months.

Lance - Is it a complete autobiography or is it mostly about your times with SDS and Weather Underground?

Cathy Wilkerson - It is a memoir that uses my own story to explore

rights movement during the thirties and forties because it was the passion of this movement that generated the hope for the next ten years. Ironically, that sense of possibility was amplified by national liberation movements, which have proved less durable. But our contribution, I think, was the sense that we could form communities that were enduring and which together could support enormous changes within our own lives and work for change within the broader society. These communities have proved to be enduring – if not the original ones, then new ones we have continued to create. In this sense, Weatherman was not particularly successful. But almost everyone in Weatherman – those of us to survive – emerged as activists who have continued to draw on the strengths of the earlier part of the sixties, and while I no longer see race/ethnic identity as the sole central construct of the world today I continue to believe it is of critical importance and I continue to listen carefully.

MUSIC REVIEWS

A

ART BRUT "Formed A Band / Bad Weekend" 7"

This is a hilarious record. It's almost like Vomit Launch's "Life Sucks". The band rocks out a guitar driven post-punk rhythm that owes a bit to old Modern Lovers. The main vocal is a deadpan voice stating that "Look at us... Formed a band." But then later he informs us that the vocals are serious and not ironic through the lyrics making them doubly ironic.

"Bad Weekend" is also petty funny. Sort of another alienated look at pop culture. Another pretty powerful sounding song too. I guess the whole thing could just be some student-y piss take. But I guess that's okay. When someone with no personal agenda steps up and just tells it like it is (in this case the over importance of people in bands) there might be more of an impact than the same old thing again and again.

But this is probably already over-thinking it. It probably took 5 minutes for the whole concept. If that's true, they got really lucky with this classic.

Of course, the title is misleading. These people are not outsider artists. Their music is very competent. But it's still raw as hell. I wonder what exactly goes on at Rough Trade's AOR department? (Rough Trade, www.roughtraderecords.com)

C

COXON, GRAHAM "Freakin' Out / All Over Me" 7"

Graham Coxon was the best part of Blur, I don't think anyone would argue that. So I'm always intrigued when he has a new solo release out. This two song 7" might be the record I've been hoping he would make.

He certainly wears his influences on his sleeve. Both titles sound so much like Dino Jr. songs. In that tradition, "Freakin' Out" is a great power pop song driven by a huge guitar riff as good as anything you would have expected from the Descendents. It's a really exciting song and his disaffected vocals draw you in more than the over emoting of the next closest American pop punk record.

The b-side is almost like a "Parklife" era demo at times. But then it keeps pace and if anything is almost a little Pink Floyd-ish. It's a Hammond organ away from psych. It's great too.

Crazy packaging, but I guess he's got the money to burn. Super thick gatefold with two sided color poster makes this a real steal. (Transcopic Records, www.transcopic.com)

E

EXPERIMENTAL DENTAL SCHOOL "Hideous Dance Attack" LP

This record came out a year ago. But I just got it while we were in Germany. I like vinyl, so...

Yeah, this is pretty great. I kind of was freaked out by this the first time. It's a startling record. Everything seems to be jumping at you at once. But once you get into their groove, it's really cool.

I guess you could say that there are elements of the Ex or Dog Faced Hermans with the beautiful and brittle guitar sound. The vocals are something like the Pop Group in the early days or, I dunno, a young Danny Elfman being set on fire. The whole band is great. The bumping and jabbing organ/keyboard is not as extreme as some groups of their ilk (Les Georges Leningrad come to mind). It's more like "Casino Worker" era Fall or maybe the criminally underrated Shrug. I dunno

The artwork is really fantastic as well. I highly recommend you track down the vinyl as you are gonna want that front cover as big as is possible.

(The Company With The Golden Arm, www.tcwtga.de)

G

LES GEORGES LENINGRAD "Supa Doopa / Nebraska's Valentine" 7"

It seems like Les Georges Leningrad may be the French Canadian answer to proto/post-No Wave God Is My Co-Pilot. Remember them? I heard the guy was a dick. But you can't beat some of those singles.

Whatever. This record takes the band a little further along, fussing around with tempo. But really, they just need to freak out and live within the terror of those dissonant chords and everyone will be happy. Who am I kidding? Most of their fans just wanna see the girls prance around. But I think the music is really great. Their vocal approach is the antithesis of rock 'n' roll and there is really something to be said for that.

These bands are the true Buddhist experience. They're not meant to last. Their music isn't really meant to last. It's a spontaneous expression of rhythm and emotion coupled with musical challenges and experiments. They don't play for a rock and roll audience. You can't possibly expect that in a band like this. It's great.

The a-side is from the band's second album, which just came out a couple of months ago. I wonder how far this band will go. Do they think someday they will be the new Erase Errata? What does ambition mean to a group like Les Georges Leningrad? (For Us Records)

GORILLA ANGREB "Astma" 7" EP

Denmark is the latest capital of punk despite the death of Paragraf 119 and their spiritual leadership. Gorilla Angreb have become my favorite new jack Danish band. With all the talk about them being like the Avengers or X, I had been wanting to get my hands on this record for a while.

When I did finally find it in Alborg (thanx Peter!), it wasn't at all what I thought it would be. It's something much more punk and much more unique. In fact, the singer sounds more like Beki Bondage than Exene or Penelope. It's great. They aren't really a thrash outfit and are at times more along the lines of "Rock N Roll Massacre" which is one of my favorite Vice Squad numbers.

The tunes are all memorable and the production is a great attempt at '80s rawness. In it's attempt, it sounds like something else. But it's good and full of fuzz and hiss. Brilliant looking sleeve as well. Can't wait to hear what they do next. (Kick N' Punch Records)

H

HARD SKIN "Same Meat, Different Gravy" LP

It's finally out and I was lucky enough to have seen them live in London a few weeks back. Thirteen new tracks and they're all brilliant. You love the first album? You will love this one. It sounds huge and the songs are still catchy as hell. I've seen it live. It's a sound prediction. The new hit is definitely "Copper Cunt". You'll be humming it all day long.

To step away from the shtick, I think it's worth mentioning that it is funny that it took Hard Skin for people to finally start realizing what a brilliant songwriter Ben Corrigan is. He's a friend. But I've been very much a fan of his songwriting from the first moment I heard Thatcher On Acid's "Curdled". That to me is still one of the classic anarcho records defining the non-trash music from the late '80s. He

was consistent throughout Thatch's existence and continued with the Tone. I just find it funny that it takes Hard Skin for people to start noticing what a knack that guy has for great, catchy tunes. (Ermit Records, PO Box 309, Leeds LS2 7AH, UK)

S

SUBHUMANS "Live In A Dive" CD

Hey, second live CD in a row I've gotten from the good folks at Fat that I've been intrigued by (I'm a sucker for Sick Of It All). Fuck, these bands play long sets! This one is 26 songs in total, all of it raging.

I always change my mind about live records. I sort of like bootlegs and weird fan-only documents. But I usually don't think much of official live releases. They usually smack of a cheap way to make some cash. That's probably true with this release, but the product more than makes up for it.

First off, the sound on some of the original Subhumans singles. I mean, I love that shit. God knows they're one of my favorite bands of all time. I'm glad you can still hear the singles collection in its ragged glory. But it's great to hear the band storming through an incredibly tight version of the classics with real quality in the recording.

I think this live recording really captures why I still love this band and will always go out of my way to see them live even 20+ years on. As a serious fan, I could pick at little things like certain songs I would have rather wanted (no "Cradle To The Grave"?) but I can't think of what I would have left out. Definitely something for fans of every era of the band.

(Fat Wreck, www.fatwreck.com)

U

UNIFORM APPROACH "A Pledge To The Edge"

Wow, this is awesome. If you ever had any interest in the great era of British hardcore that included bands like Heresy and Ripcord, you need this. If you ever thought you loved the energy of straight edge but couldn't get behind the dogma. Even better, if you thought most straight edge was hilarious. Those are all pretty obvious reasons to need to track down this record.

Recorded back in the day. This record was sort of a joke side project for the guys from Heresy and spoofs early American straight edge hardcore. Sounding like the first Youth of Today 7", this grainy recording is a perfect document of that time. The front cover almost looks like a Brian Wallsby.

The thing that gets me about records like this is that, yeah, it was done in fun. But I do actually like this kind of stuff. It is very fast and at times sounds like it could be on "Face Up To It" or something. In fact, from what I remember of that record, it's very similar sound quality. I think there are only a few hundred of these in the world, so you better track one down while you've got the heads up. (Shortfuse Records)

UP, ARI "True Warrior / I'm Allergic" 7"

Holy shit, this single out of nowhere is fucking amazing. She sings and it is totally unmistakable. Side one mixes her later Slits type work with well organized backing tracks that are equal parts soul and new wave. It is so hard to explain her vocal delivery. On the one hand, it's almost like she's ranking and rapping on parts of the song. But there is just this very real quality to her voice that you can't mistake. I think there are more parallels between Ari Up and Patti Smith than people have ever thought. There is something meta-physical about this kind of singing. It's trance inducing. But the tone and range is especially unique as well

The b-side starts with a New Age Steppers sort of rhythm but quickly charges into a straight up rocker that is the closest thing to "rock music" as she has ever come in her career.

Look, I've never known exactly what she's been on about. She's not the person you can just get. She is unique and therefore doesn't have a support group saying "yeah, I know just how she feels". But it's the people that just get it. It's that something that is in her voice. You have to trust it. I really love this record as much as almost anything else she's done. (For Us Records)

V

V/A "Electronic 01" 2xCD

V/A "Rock And Roll 01" 2xCD

V/A "Country 01" 2xCD

V/A "Counter Culture 03: Best of 2003" 2xCD

A few months back, I reviewed an amazing double CD put out by the Rough Trade Shop on Talbot Road covering what they considered to be quintessential post-punk from the late '70s to the present. Well, I've since grabbed a few more of their comps (via Sean) and they're all brilliant. Here's a rundown:

The first of the genre specific compilations covers examples what seems like a pretty broad definition of electronic "music". Avoiding the thankless job of defining, they make the right choice in not bothering giving samples of everything. You start with Brian Eno (who in an interview once described Jimi Hendrix as a great electronic musician as he was one of the first to be completely aware of tone and noise as an aesthetic that can be assigned a value) and go from there. There are pioneers like Rod Freeman and the Blue Men as well as the BBC Radiophonic Workshop as well as the avant-garde of Throbbing Gristle and Matmos. There's the futuristic pop of Kraftwerk and Stereolab as well as the merish pop of Depeche Mode and the Human League. None of the actual selections are obvious and you can analyze this pastiche in as many ways as you can analyze an action painting.

Reducing rock and roll to two discs is a brave and funny task. That it can be distilled into a spirit as well as a sound has always been the argument and this compilation in essence claims that both are essential. Another thought is that a band might only be able to encapsulate rock and roll for one song. The Butthole Surfers appear on this comp doing "Human Cannonball" and while I don't think of them as quintessential rock and roll, this song is. It's like some of the greatest rock and roll moments from the likes of the Stooges, the Dirtbombs, the Modern Lovers, the Birthday Party, Mudhoney, the Saints, Pere Ubu, Mission of Burma and many, many more.

As far as I can tell, the last of the genre specific releases was "Country 01" which follows the same logic as "Rock and Roll 01". As a result, you get a wholly unusual country comp that is smarter than most. There are a million country compilations in this world and Rough Trade hands you a platter juxtaposing different elements mostly taken out of context to create something new and exciting. Again, not the tracks you would expect from the Replacements, Meat Puppets, X, the Mekons, Souled American, and more.

I think the most recent compilation they released was the round up of best releases in the shop from 2003. As most of the store employees got to pick their own faves, it's a bit more hit and miss, at least for me. But the great stuff is incredible and is a reminder that even when it seems like music is dead, there are good things happening every year. You just have to remember. Major highlights of the first disc for me were the beautiful Iron and Wine with their Stereolab cover, Cody Chestnutt's "With Me In Mind (with Sonja Marie)", the timeless and beautiful "Care" from Kaada (from their excellent "Thank You For Giving Me Your Valuable Time" CD on Ipecac), the futuristic and beautiful "The District Sleeps Alone Tonight" from The Postal Service (beats the hell out of Death Cab For

Cuties recent, tired output), and the heartbreaking "New Friend" from The Concretes.

The second disc is a lot less, I dunno, "accessible"? Maybe it's just that the first disc is so much more chill. More cool shit like "Fuck the People" which is the best thing from the Kills, the art-damage drone of "Sid Vicious Is Dead (Ed Laliq Mix)" from Some Product, the ever-rocking "Let's Get Sick" from the Dirtbombs, the neo-no wave of "Spread Your Legs, Release the Bats" from Die Monitr Batss, the space age driving music of "Crazy Love" from Colder, the post-Fall post-punk of "New Materiology" from The Barcelona Pavilion, and the trance-like "I Still Don't Love You" from White Trash. (www.roughtrade.com)

FILM REVIEWS

B

BAADASSSSS (dir. by Mario Van Peebles)

Man, I was so fucking excited when I heard that this film was being made. When I was a kid, I would spend weekends with my Dad. There are two things I remember doing. One was shopping for model ships and airplanes from World War II. The other was going to see two or three movies in an afternoon. We saw EVERY Hong Kong action movie and EVERY blaxploitation flick that came out in the early '70s. So Melvin Van Peebles and "Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song" holds a special place for me in my memories.

Based on his father's book, Mario Van Peebles recreated the story of the making of "Sweet Sweetback..." and the incredible struggle it took to get it funded and distributed. First, the major studios wanted nothing to do with a film about a black man turned revolutionary who kills a cop and gets away with it. They didn't want anyone making a film where city cops are exposed as racist and crooked. The racist unions wouldn't allow him to make a movie with a crew of whites, blacks, Latinos and Asians. To make matters worse, real racist cops step in and arrest half of the crew illegally.

Basically, this film is "American Splendor" meets "Reds". It's the story of a guy working outside of the system eventually developing support from committed people who understood his vision with the ultimate triumph being the movie itself. Like "Reds", there are talking heads giving testimonials throughout. My favorite scene in "American Splendor" is the final moment where you get to see Harvey's actual retirement party with no actors and all real people. At the end of "Baadasssss" you get to see the real people and I thought I was going to cry. It's a great movie all the way to the very last second.

C

CONTROL ROOM (directed by Jehane Noujaim)

For me, Al-Jazeera means one thing: proof. When I think of how skewed and yellow video journalism is, I remember that millions and millions of people in the world are getting their news from Al-Jazeera. That's my proof that there is hope for the world. That they are willing to challenge and question everything from Arab leaders to the United States to the nature of unbiased news coverage... Since their start in 1996, they've been slammed in the Arab world for being too pro-American and by the US for being pro-Al Qaeda. As most good lefties know, that usually means you're doing something right. I have much respect for Al-Jazeera and was excited to know that a documentary was being made about them and their take on the War with Iraq.

The film "Control Room" is further proof. With time-tested verité technique, we see what it is like to run Al-Jazeera and what kinds of people make up the staff from the translators to the journalists. The film travels back and forth between the stations headquarters in Qatar and CentCom which is the main press briefing room set up by the US military in Iraq. It's a breath of fresh air to see an entire

network of people who are smart and committed to the idea of debate and communication. I don't think you could find that at any of the major news networks in the States. Their operations, anecdotes and analysis are worthy of a documentary alone.

But there are specific moments in the film that are especially profound and upsetting even to a long-time commie like myself. First and foremost, there is the death of an Al-Jazeera journalist. Before the troops entered Baghdad, the US committed air strikes on civilian targets including the building housing Al-Jazeera. In the attack, one of their correspondents is killed along with three other journalists. There is footage of the journalist facing him head-on right up until seconds before the attack. That along with a plea for justice from the journalist's wife and a completely absurd justification for the attack from the US is both infuriating and literally sickening.

The second most important moment in the film is the so-called liberation of Baghdad. As a result of the attack on Al-Jazeera, their remaining correspondents were forced to return home to Qatar where the network is based. Now recognized as a target of the US military, Iraqis were naturally hesitant to house anyone representing the station. In the end, only the ridiculous foreign press was there to cover the troops coming into the town square and the people toppling over the statue of Saddam Hussein. What's most illuminating is the analysis from the Al-Jazeera journalists as they watch the events unfold. Senior Producer Samir Khader talks about how he's from Iraq. He's lived in Iraq. The people that toppled the statue were not Iraqi. They didn't look Iraqi and they didn't have Iraqi accents. Another journalist wonders why there are only a dozen people celebrating. Where were the village people? Where were the women from the area? How is it that one of them just happened to have the old Iraqi flag in his pocket? Had he "just kept it there for the past ten years?" Producer Deema Khatib wonders where the troops were. Where was the army? It becomes very obvious, as people have been muttering for some time now that it was all a faked, staged event for Western "news" cameras.

Finally there is the case of Lt. Josh Rushing. Throughout the film, he is the American representative that has debates and discussions with the many Arab journalists. Despite having to take the absurd position of defending US aggression, he is intelligent and empathetic. At one point he becomes self-analytical and candid talking about how he had seen images of dead Iraqi casualties one day and it didn't affect him. The next day, he was footage of American casualties and it made him sick. At that point he really had to face himself and while still in the process at least recognize how much he hates war. That story doesn't end there. With the release of the film, the Pentagon ordered Rushing not to comment on the film. Offended by this gesture, he is now seeking to leave the Marines. (www.controlroommovie.com/site/01.html)

D

DREAMERS, THE (directed by Bernardo Bertolucci)

The first time I saw this film, I really felt like it was made for me. You can probably understand why. First of all, Paris, May 1968, you know what goes down. Second, three people brought together by their love of film in the '60s. I was at the edge of my seat slack jawed. It's the kind of movie I wish everyone could appreciate and made me desperate to find someone to talk to that could understand this movie the same way I did.

The story follows Michael Pitt though your identifying with him as a main character comes and goes. He is a young student studying for the year in Paris in 1968. He meets two fairly affluent twins, Theo and Isabelle, whose poet father and British mother are going away for a while. They meet at Cinematheque Francaise, which was the most important place at the time for film lovers. It's where Truffaut, Chabrol and Godard and others would come to discuss film. It was the essentially the birthplace of Cahiers Du Cinema. The first time we see Michael there, they are showing "Sock Corridor" and we

get to see some of the key moments of one of Sam Fuller's greatest works.

With their parents away, they invite Michael to move in with them. They are intrigued by his intellect and his encyclopedic knowledge of film. From there they live a life half in and half out of film constantly quoting and referring to films such as "Breathless", "Freaks", "Blonde Venus" and one of my all time favorites "Mouchette" while the director encourages them by switching from the three characters to the actual film footage seamlessly. In one amazing sequence, the trio reenacts the classic scene of Anna Karina and friends racing through the Louvre in "Band of Outsiders". The three are determined to break the film's record of nine minutes and 45 seconds. Bertolucci switches back and forth between the original Godard film and his recreation to dizzying effect. For fans of the film, it's titillating and decadent far beyond any of the sex the film (as well as director) is known for.

Sex is a big part of the film as the twins try to be aloof, but are as ultimately affected as Michael. During one of their many film quizzes, Michael is drawn into having sex with Isabelle. Only when they're done does he realize that for all her freeness and sophistication, she was a virgin. It is one of the few moments when she is completely emotional and not playing a part as she cries in his arms.

The twins themselves are trapped in what can best be described as a Platonic incest. This is where Bertolucci starts mining in familiar areas. His exploration of sexuality and un-discussed areas of possibility have been a theme in most of his twenty or so films. I first remember being fascinated by "Luna" when I was a kid. I had been in love Jill Clayburgh for some, probably Oedipal reason. In that 1979 film, she has an affair with her teen son. While moody and erotic, the film was dealing with such a taboo subject; it seemed like know one knew how to describe it other than surreal. It really wasn't. It was very real only dealing with an area of sexuality in a mostly objective manner.

The backdrop of the film is Paris in 1968. I've probably written too much about this already. The student over-population in Nanterre mixed with their isolation outside of Paris mixed with the boredom of being a student while the world was erupting lead to massive political upheaval. By May, the students and workers were together having brought the entire country to a standstill. It was the closest thing to revolution in Europe since the Spanish Revolution. The three characters in this film don't represent what was really happening in the streets and that is probably a good thing because a lot of the film's success is its hands off attitude towards politics. Mathew is smug in his bourgeois ideas of non-violence and his fear of collectivization. Theo is completely dogmatic in his ill-informed Mao-ism ignorant to the fact that he is from the bourgeois and has totally alienated himself from the street battles happening daily. Isabelle lives for her brother and is ultimately un-phased by the world outside of their apartment.

Bertolucci, for me anyway, is sort of hit or miss. It's fascinating to me that a man that can make "The Conformist" and "Last Tango In Paris" could also make "Besieged". It's hard to separate analysis and my deeper feelings about this movie. It's a love letter to May '68 and it's beautiful.
(www.the-dreamers.com)

F

FLOWER OF EVIL (directed by Claude Chabrol)

Incest that isn't incest is also a theme in Chabrol's latest "La Fleur Du Mal". A brother and a sister, who are engaged in a physical relationship, are siblings due to a marriage and not blood. Again, guilt is so far removed that even their parents had always hoped they would become a couple.

The film starts with the brother returning from a four-year stint in

the states. He is picked up by his father who seems to be an affable and simple guy. His stepmother is a local politician who comes across as grossly ambitious pushing her family to the side with the characters vaguely implying at some infidelity with her running mate. His sister, it seems, is attracted to him while he rejects her.

But all this is half-truth as slowly unravels in this light mystery about upper middle class decadence and what they think is communication. There is the mystery in the foreground, in public discussion, about the family's relationship to Nazi collaborators in the past. There is a secondary mystery out of the public eye that becomes the most important about the father, his own motives, and how they grow closer and closer to the family.

Chabrol's influence from Baudelaire, well as a fan of both, I don't really get it. I see this movie, like some of Chabrol's other critiques of the petit-bourgeois, more of an alternate reality that I'm not privy to. It's socialism of the privileged, and it's intriguingly perverse. The incest is safe while alluring. The murder is secondary and unresolved by the film's end. The film closes with credits running during a party while a corpse waits unacknowledged. What will become of the characters ends up being unimportant.

In many ways, this is Chabrol at his most sophisticated. The need to move between audience-aimed actions is replaced by built-up realism. The dialog is smart and the uneven story progression seems especially real. He's sacrificed his scathing wit to allow for the characters to organically develop at the limitations of their own wisdom.

Part of the original nouvelle vogue and as important historically as Truffaut and Godard, this is just one part of a larger body of work matching that of Eric Rohmer and Stephen Frears.
(www.mk2.com/fleur/site.html)

FREAKS AND GEEKS (created by Paul Feig)

Most TV is atrocious. I'm granting the premise that most of you black clad, patches sewn on, fanzine readin' types subscribe to. Commercials are a modern manifestation on Hitler's theories of propaganda. Most television is aimed at the lowest common denominator. As a result, inadvertently or not, TV makes people dumber.

I feel like I have to make that disclaimer every time I write something like this. Yeah, it's mostly horrible. But once in a while there are shining moments that are so great, so meaningful, so artistic, it's hard to believe that it was allowed to exist at all. That's definitely true for "Freaks And Geeks", one of the greatest television shows of all time.

I guess it's no surprise that it was only on for one season. Aimed at ideas alien to TV like character development, smart dialog, equal parts drama and comedy, it was a smart and unusual show making it inherently threatening to consumer America and the market forces that serve as it's dictatorship.

I've got a personal connection to this show. This was really my life. It follows a sister and brother, Lindsay and Sam Weir. Sophomore and freshman respectively, Lindsay has a life changing moment knocking her out of her conservative academic world and forcing her to question her own reasons for existence by way of hanging out with the school freaks. At different times, these kids have been known as the stoners, the heshers, the dirtheads, whatever. Sam, on the other hand, is heading into every awkward situation a 14 year old geek can. He and his two best friends are outcasts, they're unpopular, they're in the AV Club, they play D & D on the weekends. It all takes place in 1980 which is when I started high school. Believe me, I was not a cool kid. Thank God for that.

The show starts off spoofing "Dawson's Creek" and the opening scene ends with Lindsay, who you're just realizing is the main protagonist, saying, "I hate high school." From that moment on, I

knew I was going to love this show.

What I grew to really love about this show is that nobody is completely innocent and nobody is completely evil. They'll spend episode after episode showing someone to be a bully and then out of nowhere you'll get a little insight into their life and history. Everyone is sympathetic on some level. The conversations feel so real and the relationships are unlike any I can think of on TV. Even the parents are never stereotypical. Lindsay and Sam love their parents and in turn the parents are always trying to do the right thing successful or not.

I can watch this show over and over again. Every episode has a number of scenes that will have you dying laughing or sobbing. The writers and directors (Paul Feig, Judd Apatow, Jake Kasdan, the great Mike White) are all laughing with you. It's their revenge on high school.

If you were a cool kid or a jock in high school, you probably won't get it. It's not aimed at you. In fact, a lot of the humor is at your expense. But if you were a geek or a freak, this is a great look back on what were probably some terrible times. Now that we know how the story ends in our own lives, it's fun and safe to look back and laugh.

M

MORVERN CALLAR (directed by Lynne Ramsay)

I love Samantha Morton. I love that she says what she says, does what she does and ultimately has enough self-confidence to not give a shit about what anyone else thinks. In many ways, she's the new Jennifer Jason Leigh and that's a great thing.

Morvern is a young Scottish girl who comes home one Winter night to find that her boyfriend has killed himself. He's lying naked on the floor where he'll stay for a little while. After going thoroughly through his suicide note, it doesn't seem so outrageous that she not call the police (he's not going anywhere) but instead goes to a raucous Christmas party where she loses herself.

From there she becomes and even more complex and intriguing character. Her sorrow is masked with a disturbing lust for life. Her dead boyfriend was a former writer with one last manuscript that she promptly assigns her name to, gets it published and spends her first royalty check indulging with her best friend, played wonderfully by Kathleen McDermott, in food, drugs and eventually sex as they head off to Spain for some hedonistic fun in the sun. Only when faced with a long empty Spanish road by herself does she finally allow her grief to at all interfere with her joie de vivre.

"Morvern Callar" is the latest from Lynne Ramsay, director of '99s excellent "Ratcatcher". It's rhythm is time-stopping and observational no matter how much activity is happening in the scene. The parties are as contemplative as Morvern alone in the cold apartment with her boyfriend's corpse. Hopefully Samantha Morton will take this and the equally incredible "Under The Skin" and make more of a meal out of this area of her seemingly endless plate of talent.
(www.lionsgatefilms.com)

MOTORCYCLE DIARIES, THE (dir. by Walter Salles)

I just caught this before it left the theaters and I'm glad I did. Like most of you, I read this at THAT age when I was also reading stuff like Malcolm X's autobiography and the Tao of Pooh. I'm still down with it all. I waited until the last minute mostly because I was sort of worried this would seem trite or simplistic to me now.

In fact, "The Motorcycle Diaries" is a beautiful and for the most part understated look at Che's legendary trip across South America that led to his political awakening. Rather than give you some really obvious political rite of passage, you get a beautiful story about the love of the people and the land. More so than his Marxist adopted

philosophy, you get to see how the trip evolved his ideas of internationalism. Out of the theater, the audience can analyze for themselves how internationalism is something you feel and how revolution is not something you can simply learn in college.

Director Walter Salles knows what he's doing. The film is as warm and concerned as his other films like "Central Station" and "Behind The Sun". His footage of Machu Picchu is as beautiful as "Aguirre". He must have found the exact same stoop that Herzog used.

Gael Garcia Bernal is great as the pre-revolutionary Che. Actually, he's the pre-Che Che. I don't know if I've seen him in a movie I didn't like. "Amores Perros", "Y Tu Mama Tambien", "Crime of Padre Amaro" and even "Don't Tempt Me". I'm really curious about "Cuba Libre". I'm not really familiar with Rodrigo De La Serna. But he's great as Alberto Granado, Che's travel partner.

Hey, I like communist movies. I like communist everything. But this movie is beautiful to watch no matter what you think of Che. It's one of those movies that I just can't imagine transferring to the small screen with even half of its power.

It's great to see that the new found popularity and power of Latino and Latina stars has lead to such great biopics that reach large North American audiences starting with Frida and now this.

MY VOYAGE TO ITALY (directed by Martin Scorsese)

What is it that's so relaxing about Martin Scorsese's voice? I don't know. I've talked to a few different people and we all find his voice to be so comforting. Plus he's smart. I loved his contribution to BFI's 100 Years of Cinema (released in the states as "A Personal Journey") and I really love the documentary "Martin Scorsese Directs" from the American Masters series. I've watched them both over and over.

So now I can add another documentary to that list with "My Voyage To Italy". Studying the most important age in film worldwide, Neo Realism, he examines the main players and their major films in a way that is engaging without condescension or over-statistical, boredom. The guy really loves movies and he knows what's important.

His film history is just one of many alternative histories to the one championed by film critics static in their culture and prejudices. In writing about Rossellini, De Sica, Fellini and my hero Antonioni he writes about what he loves and what he sees as important. He even picks films that were seen as disasters financially and critically pointing out how their importance was more profound than such predictable criteria. For example, Rossellini's "Voyage To Italy" was a critical and financial failure but what championed by the Cahiers Du Cinema writers like Godard and Truffaut.

Scorsese's narration is smart and so loving that from anyone else you would think it pitiful. But in this situation, its inspiring and just great storytelling.

P

PING PONG (directed by Fumihiko Sori)

There's a lot of great stuff coming from Japan these days and it's not on horror flicks about stylized spirits and discordant ghostly sounds. "Ping Pong" has something and it captures a feel that many people I know who have visited Japan felt on first viewing "Lost In Translation". It looks like Tokyo and it looks like hyper-real Tokyo at the same time.

But this is a very, very different story from "Lost In Translation". Based on a manga, this is a surreal and existential and neo-Zen comedy about the competitive world of young ping pong players in modern Japan. Peco and Smile are two players who have been friends since their youth. Peco (Yosuke Kubozuka of "Go" and

"Tomie: Replay") is the brash and outrageous champion who crushes all opponents while rubbing their face in it. Smile (Arata from "After-life") is the better player (he's called Smile because he never does – Excellent!) but isn't especially interested and often loses on purpose to Peco out of some sort of loyalty. Not only does this anger his coach (a former ping pong star) but it gives Peco a further inflated ego.

During an interschool competition, both are defeated. Peco loses to the champ of the disciplinarian, militaristic school of skinheads named Dragon (newcomer Shido Nakamura). Smile loses to China (Sam Lee of "Gen-X Cops" and "Public Toilet"), so named, as that's where he is a pro and he's just in Japan to kick start his career (sort of like when a ball player gets sent back down to the minors for a tune-up). Needless to say, the rest of the movie involves the two needing to pick themselves up off the floor solving the inequities of their friendship along the way. And of course, it all is heading back to a great rematch.

This is a lot of fun as the competitions are startling in their originality and quite beautiful at times. There are some amazing epiphanies from one character re-christening himself in a river, one of the skinheads getting his due and when Dragon learns to play ping pong completely for pleasure.

I'll also say this; the soundtrack is amazing. I don't know who any of these groups are. They're all Japanese. But we were all jumping up and down to the music the first time we saw it. If you have an all-region DVD player, I would suggest you get the Japanese disc as it comes with a feature where you can watch the whole movie with just the music soundtrack. (www.pingpong-movie.com)

PUBLIC TOILET (directed by Fruit Chan)

Dong Dong is the God of Toilets. He was born in a toilet, he lives near a toilet and he understands life through toilets. The public toilet is a way of understanding world cultures whether it's his friends (Chinese, Japanese, Italian, Somali) or around the world. The public toilet is unique to its surroundings, which, as a common and natural function, is ultimately above judgment. Disdain and even disgust at other culture's public toilets can even be jingoistic.

"Public Toilet" is a film by Fruit Chan who has taken his internal camera and externalized it, audience be damned. The idea of the public toilet is the thread that goes from surface to subtext to depth and back. He's not interested in making a linear film and in the end has created something of a lo-fi epic. Using Digital Video with little or no concern to aesthetic quality or standard practices, he has made something beautiful and not just because of it's projected realism. The footage is ugly as hell at times and the repetition of dirty footage becomes a style of it's own. Ultimately, it becomes appealing in the way that Super 8 home movies have become beautiful. Chan is years ahead of his time.

Shot on location at the Great Wall, Hong Kong, Beijing, Korea, Rome, India, the variety of images are blunt and fluctuate in the filth of DV. But this helps to tell the story. Hey, it's a film called "Public Toilet". Were you expecting Merchant / Ivory?

Spanning three continents, the film follows the lives of three different groups. The first is Dong Dong and his pals. His grandma is in a coma. His friend, Tony's little brother is also in the hospital with no cure. The two set off in different directions to find cures. The trip leads them across three continents and finds only existential solutions. Tony travels in India where he finds two brothers who speak Cantonese. They're going to India for the first time to help their dying father and to bathe in the Ganji. Dong Dong goes to Korea where he seeks a number of solutions.

This tangentially connects him with another story of a young Korean man who finds a woman living in his outdoor porta-toilet.

Taking her to a doctor, he finds she has no bones. She claims to be a creature of the sea and therefore is like him and alien at the same time. For this, he thinks she is from the North. His best friend is also ill and takes off on a trip to find his own cure. Knowing he only has about ten years to live, he says a final good-bye to his friend not wanting to put that off for a decade.

Dong Dong travels to New York to find his cure. In Times Square he is almost oblivious speaking on his cell phone and standing in a tunnel of snow that connects him to the snow in China outside of the public toilet. While there, he meets a Chinese hitman on his last job. He's quitting at the request of his girlfriend. She is at the Great Wall looking for a healer to help her ill mother.

Another story involves Dong Dong's friend who has returned to Italy but that story seems to have been cut short because of the tragic death of actor Pietero Dilleti.

Terminal illness is a theme that Fruit Chan has visited before and it represents Hong Kong and China's future. Not based around Hong Kong, in this film it takes the form of new China searching out its identity and future. Pusan is false histories. Manhattan is violent death for cash. India is the possibility of rebirth. But none dominate and the answer isn't provided or even supposed by the filmmaker.

S

SHAUN OF THE DEAD (directed by Edgar Wright)

I absolutely loved "Spaced". I can watch any episode of that show over and over. It's just so funny, and clever and aimed at bringing happiness to geeks like me who are part of the international war to legitimize sci-fi and horror films. So, I was so excited to find that the director and one of the writers were working on a feature length zombie film.

"Shaun of the Dead" is exactly what I wanted. It's a very, very funny zombie film that that responds to all of my "Spaced" needs including featuring most of the cast. Simon Pegg is essentially Tim, trying to save a relationship that he bungled up by spending too much time at the pub with his pal and roommate as well as playing video games. That friend is once again Nick Frost, though this time as Ed, he's a slovenly bum who's juvenile activities are a big part of why Shaun/Tim is in hot water with his girlfriend. Their third roommate is Peter Serafinowicz who once again is the heavy telling Shaun/Tim to get his shit together while just barely keeping his anger at Ed. There are quite a few stars from "The Office" as well.

Like "Spaced" the humor comes from finding the mundane and funny aspects of daily life this time doubling the humor putting them into the context of a horror film. It feels like how we would react to fighting a zombie invasion. They attempt kill a zombie by throwing things at him but are completely inept missing him completely more times than naught. The result is they are left throwing LPs at the slowly advancing zombies while Shaun/Tim goes through his collection trying to decide which records he doesn't want to part with.

It's constantly referring to other films a la "Spaced" to the point where they are calling Shaun/Tim's mother, Barbara, to tell her they're coming to get her and Ed yells, "We're coming to get you, Barbara" like in "Night of the Living Dead". Plus there are references from "Evil Dead", "28 Days Later" and loads more. It's fast paced and is in some ways like a British Kevin Smith film.

It's also worth mentioning that the film uses the music of Queen to great effect. There is a zombie fight scene in a pub that is brought to a whole different level to the tune of "Don't Stop Me Now".

It doesn't look good for "Spaced" ever getting released in the states. Apparently, they can't secure the rights to all the music, which is crucial to the humor of the show. But this flick is great isn't just to amuse fans of Tim and Daisy. I hope it's a success as there is a

rumor that they might do a sequel called "From Dusk 'Til Shaun"!

W

WATTSTAX (dir. by Mel Stuart)

Late one night when I was a kid, I was watching TV by myself like I did almost every weekend in the wee hours (I still can't sleep). I came across "Wattstax" one night and it blew me away. I had never heard of the Watts Riots. I certainly had never heard of the Wattstax concert. It was a totally eye-opening experience.

Now over 30 years later, "Wattstax" is finally out on DVD and it's beautiful. It's probably the best music documentary ever made. Seven years after the riots in Watts, a concert was thrown at the LA Coliseum where 100,000 people came out to remember the event. The film covers the concert with amazing sound quality and some of the only live footage I've ever seen by amazing groups like the Staples, the Emotions, the totally amazing Bar-Kays... You also get the criminally underrated Carla Thomas with one of the greatest voices of all time coming through crystal clear in this new digital release.

Along with the music you get the classic between song banter with Rufus Thomas and the audience, you get Richard Pryor at his peak, you get Melvin Van Peebles doing his thing and you get Jesse Jackson hosting. Most fascinating to me, however, are the many interviews with just regular folks in Watts. Completely engrossing, the comments are sad, funny and let you emotionally know what the concert was about.

"I am a socially liberal, hippie, Rastafarian, Zen Buddhist Communist with a lot of Catholic guilt."

Bill "Spaceman" Lee

"Nature... Is nothing but the inner voice of self-interest."

Baudelaire

"Reality is that which when you stop believing in it does not go away."

Philip K. Dick



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WHY ARE YOU BEING SO REASONABLE NOW

**You've never mentioned this before
It seems I'm always the last to know
And do I have to guess how you're going to feel each day
You never have a word to say
You should have told me
I don't understand why you didn't tell me**

**Surely you must know I hate what I'm doing
I don't want to upset you but it's yourself you're fooling
The last thing I need is part twelve of the row
But just why are you being so reasonable now?**

**I don't dare answer the phone
And when you call I still pretend that I'm not home
I don't want to see you anymore
Oh love, it's just not me I'm thinking of
No one can change that much in three days
It's not yours to take back?**

**Surely you must know I hate what I'm doing
I don't want to upset you but it's yourself you're fooling
The last thing I need is part twelve of the row
But just why are you being so reasonable now?**

**How can you do this to me
How can you do this to me
How can you do this to me
How can you do this to me**